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FARREL FOX and His Girl Ferret;

OR,

The Bogus Banker's Dive-Sharks.

A STORY OF

Three New York Detectives.

BY DAN DUNNING,
(OF THE SECRET SERVICE CORPS.)

CHAPTER I.

THE DYING DETECTIVE'S CURSE.

"HELLO! Another good man gone wrong?"

"Looks like it, Bull."

"Turn him over so the light will strike his face—we may know him."

"Right! There you are, my—"

BULL PICKED UP WHITEY AND THREW HIM OVERHEAD.

"Good God! It's Mac, Fox! Mac—and murdered, man! Can't you see? Murdered!"

The time was about two A. M., the scene in the fighting Fourth Ward—and the speakers detectives—William Bull, official, and Farrel Fox, private.

On the sidewalk, between the detectives, lay the body of a man apparently about fifty-five years of age, attired in the well-worn garb of a workingman, but the disarranged gray beard under the chin revealed the fact that he was in disguise.

Bull, "The Fourth Ward Bloodhound," (as he was termed) had stooped over the man whom they had at first supposed was a "plain drunk."

Stooping, Fox passed his hand under and around the head of the victim, exclaiming:

"Yes, it's Mac, and there's been foul play. But, he's not quite gone; so find an officer and call an ambulance—quick!"

The last word came like a pistol-shot, but it was the only indication Fox gave of his intense feeling on discovering the body of his friend—the devoted ally of himself and Bull.

The latter started off with a rush, and quickly returned with both officer and ambulance.

"You go with him; I'll join you as soon as I re-report," said Bull.

Fox looked sharply at the speaker, but made no response, signifying his acquiescence by taking a seat beside the surgeon.

At the hospital, the surgeons confirmed the unspoken verdict of the detectives, on examining the head of the victim: Sandbagged!

"He will probably pass away in that condition—they generally do," carelessly remarked a surgeon.

Fox ground his teeth.

The remark was just what Fox would have expected, had the victim been a stranger.

But "Mac" was no stranger, and his anxious friend could not give up all hope.

"Is there nothing you can do? Can you not restore him to consciousness, at all events?"

"Nothing more can be done to-night. If he pulls through until morning, there will probably be an operation performed before noon, which may restore him to consciousness—but the chances are all against him."

"Whoever struck the blow, struck to kill! Vengeance, not robbery, was the motive in this case," added the surgeon, as he walked away.

"Vengeance? Ay, vengeance nerved the murderous arm, but may mine wither if I do not find its owner!" muttered Fox, as he seated himself beside his friend's bed.

Slowly the minutes passed into hours, and still the anxious watcher saw no sign of returning consciousness, nor did Bull appear.

The surgeon's verdict had prepared Fox for the former, but Bull's words at parting had indicated a speedy return to his friend, and with daylight the watcher began to grow a little uneasy.

"I should have looked into that," he muttered, referring to several men whom he had noticed on the opposite corners, close to the spot where "Mac" had been found.

An ambulance always attracts attention, and its stoppage invariably gathers a crowd, yet these men refrained from inquiring into the cause of the call.

Why? Because they already knew?

Fox was inclined to answer in the affirmative, but at that point he saw a stranger approaching—a reporter, as he rightly surmised.

"Must make a brand new face for this fellow. It won't do to have any description of the present one in print," muttered the detective.

Entering the hospital, Fox looked like a bright, shrewd business-man, and but that

he recognized the clothing, and knew something of the man's wonderful powers, the surgeon who accompanied the reporter would have thought a stranger had taken the place of the detective.

Farrel Fox was equally well-known as "Farrel the Fox," and as "The Man of Many Faces."

"Surely, that man isn't a detective? He talks like a lunatic, and looks like a fool!" exclaimed the reporter, as he left after a very brief interview with the Fox.

"Well, I know one of the two men who summoned the officer, was a detective, but, of course, you can learn all about it at the Oak street station-house."

Before the reporter could make any response, a sudden cry from the victim of the sandbag brought both to his bedside.

"Mac" had suddenly started up to a sitting position. His eyes were blazing like coals of fire; his whole frame shook with passion, and his right hand was raised threateningly.

"Delirious!" muttered the surgeon.

"Dying!" he added, the next moment, as "Mac" burst forth:

"You murderous scoundrels! This time you have succeeded, but your time, too, is short, for the curse of a dying man rests upon you!"

"Doomed, doomed! Every one of you will soon follow me!"

"To-day we were to be married. To-day I die—and it will kill her—poor Lou—"

"Curse you! You treacherous, cowardly, murderous hounds! You forget that the Fox and the Bloodhound still live—sworn to avenge me—us!"

"As by treachery I am undone, so may treachery be your portion—each selling the other!"

"Ah, Ralph! Ralph of the Red Hand."

And that was all. With the last word, Mac fell back—dead. Dead just when his talk began to take the form of information.

It was a bitter disappointment to the man who closed the dead man's eyes with tender care, and who mentally vowed:

"Never shall I rest until your murderers are punished—your curse carried out!"

"By our bond, Mac, I swear it!"

But to the reporter, the detective's sudden death was a fitting finale to his dramatic denunciation of his murderers.

After the inquest, the body and effects of the murdered man were turned over to Fox, who having removed all papers, etc., sent for an undertaker and gave him instructions for the funeral.

Queer instructions they were, too:

"Do not remove the body to your shop—although freely announcing that you intend to. Take it, instead, to this address and have a hearse and carriage there at midnight."

"From this moment until you are through, your time must be mine—your bill for it, what you please."

"Do not send any message to your people, nor explain what you have been engaged at. Remain constantly with the body until you see me again. Understand, Arthur?"

"Yes, sir. You can depend upon me."

CHAPTER II. THE FOX'S PLAN.

ON leaving the hospital, the Fox went direct to the late residence of his friend.

"Mr. McVeigh is dead—murdered," he explained to Mrs. Morgan—the motherly woman whose sole boarder the dead detective had been.

He could hardly believe that the emotion called forth by his announcement was not assumed, until the woman tore herself from his arms, and fiercely shouted:

"It's all a lie! He's not dead! Who'd dare lay a finger on him?"

"It is only too true, and I have come to

look over his papers, to see if I can obtain a clue to his murderer."

"His body will come here after dark, and will be taken away about midnight—for I have a plan of my own for ferreting out his murderers."

"You must accept me as your boarder—as if I were he who is gone—and they will have to kill him again, and yet again, before Mac's murderers are safe."

"And who are you?"

"My name is Fox."

"Ah! The Fox?"

"Yes, madam, and he was my sworn friend—mine and the Bloodhound's."

"The Bloodhound! Isn't he a regular officer of the name of Bull?"

"Yes; why?"

"Well, then, you have two jobs on hand—that's all! Bull, too, was nearly killed last night, or this morning!"

In an instant came the suspicion regarding the men seen from the ambulance, and with it the explanation of Mrs. Morgan's startling statement.

"You read that?" asked the Fox.

"Yes, but here's paper I bought just before you arrived. It says nothing of—"

But the detective was not listening, being deep in a sensational account of "Another Case of Sandbagging!"

"Ha! Mac's name unknown! Bull found in the same block, and brought to the police station unconscious, but not so badly injured as to endanger his life."

"Good enough! Now for a clue to the case poor Mac was working on, and then for his murderers! Bull may be able to throw some light on it—I'll see him after the funeral."

Thus commented the Fox as he read the newspaper article.

"Now, Mrs. Morgan," he continued, "the first thing to be done is deceive the murderers as to Mac's having been killed."

"From to-night until I've been killed, or have run down the criminals, Mac's death must be kept a profound secret—"

"There is one who must be told, though it will be a terrible blow to her, poor girl," interrupted Mrs. Morgan.

"And that is?"

"The young lady he was to marry—Louise Weston—a distant cousin of poor Mr. McVeigh, as she is to me."

"Ah! Then we may tell her, for she is like you, Bull and myself—bound by blood to avenge!"

"Bound by blood?" echoed Mrs. Morgan in inquiring surprise.

"Yes; Bull and I are sworn to avenge him, as he was to avenge either, or both, of us."

"Years ago we made deadly enemies, and swore to stand by each other—the Lion, the Bloodhound and the Fox."

"Our oath has been sealed by his blood, forming a bond stronger even than most blood relationship."

"But, I must look over Mac's papers at once, Mrs. Morgan. His body is liable to arrive here at any moment and, then, I shall have enough to occupy my time in disposing of that."

Fully satisfied as to the speaker's identity, as well as his right to examine the dead detective's papers, Mrs. Morgan led the way to the latter's room, where the Fox made a thorough search.

Among Mac's papers was a note-book. Fox had found in this a memorandum—evidently an appointment:

"Ralph Raymond—Dec. 24th.—10:30."

"Ralph Raymond—10:30, last night—he's the man without a doubt whom I must look up, first."

"Mac mentioned Ralph of the Red Hand—once of the Red Hand."

"Mac must have been stricken down about half past one—after this appointment."

Thus mused the Fox, and he was still pondering the question of treachery, a good faith, on the part of Red Handed Ralph, when the undertaker arrived with the body of McVeigh.

"Bring him up here to this room," directed Fox, and when this was done, took a cast of his dead friend's face.

"Now be on hand at midnight with a hearse and carriage. Hire them from some near-by livery stable, and mention incidentally that they are for my funeral."

The undertaker stared on receiving this order from Fox, and the latter explained:

"The fact of its being a midnight funeral will cause talk. That's all right—but it must be about me.

"I am the dead man! My friend Mac is burying me!"

"Ah! I understand your game, Mr. Fox, and you can rely on my part of it being carried out to the letter."

"Thank you, Arthur."

At precisely midnight, a hearse and a carriage stopped in front of Mrs. Morgan's residence, and a few minutes later four men carried out a coffin—one bearing a striking resemblance to McVeigh, the detective.

Nearly opposite the Morgan house was a street lamp, and as the light from this fell upon the men carrying the coffin, a man standing directly under the lamp started as if struck a sudden blow, and hurried away, muttering:

"By the eternal, Mac still lives! Who was the other?"

"Did you notice that man who ran away from under the lamp as we came out?" asked Arthur, as the carriage containing him and the Fox started after the hearse.

"No; for I'm not ashamed to say I was nearly blind with tears."

"Well, it may be a mistake, but I'd be willing to swear it was Bull—the Central Office man—I suppose you know him!"

CHAPTER III.

MISS LOUISE WESTON.

THE morning following the funeral.

The Fox has just returned from Police Headquarters and is seated in the apartments formerly occupied by his friend McVeigh.

For once the Fox is quite upset, and is brooding over the fact that Detective Bull not having been as seriously injured as was at first supposed, had been sent home; but on inquiring there, it was found that he had remained only an hour.

"And we have not seen him since," concluded Bull's sister, with whom the Fox and Mac were well acquainted.

"Did he say where he was going, or for how long?"

"Yes, he said something about seeing Mr. Fox."

The speaker looked curiously at the detective—who it must be remembered had assumed the well-known appearance of his murdered friend—when the latter was supposed to be out of disguise.

"I must have forgotten something in the make-up," thought the Fox, catching the look, and left saying he would call again during the day.

Returning home the detective looked carefully over his disguise, but could discover no defect, and this made him all the more uneasy and dissatisfied regarding Bull's actions.

"The undertaker knows Bull well. He swears it was Bull. If it was, why did he run away?"

"Then, again, he is away from home since last night—and not on duty, yet hasn't called either here or at my house."

These thoughts were what was troubling the Fox when shortly after his return home, Mrs. Morgan came to his apartments.

"Miss Weston—the lady I spoke of last night—has arrived," she announced.

"Have you informed her about what has occurred?"

"I have."

"And of my intention to impersonate him?"

"Yes, and she wishes to see you."

"How did she take the news?"

"Very quietly. She did not shed a tear."

"I will be down directly, and will not return to my room again, but, of course, if Miss Weston desires to see, or have, any of poor Mac's things, you will attend to the matter."

Descending to the parlor a few minutes later, the detective met Miss Weston—a beautiful girl of about twenty, rather tall and very pale.

Although the Fox was startlingly like Mac, Miss Weston greeted him calmly.

"Mrs. Morgan informs me that yourself, and your friend, Mr. Bull, intend devoting all your time to finding Mr. McVeigh's murderers. If I can give any information, or otherwise assist you, please call on me."

"I will do so. Do you happen to know anything of Mac's business affairs?"

"Something, but not much."

"Ever hear him mention anything denoting his relations with one Ralph Raymond?"

"Yes; but why do you ask?"

"Because Mac had an appointment with this Raymond at 10:30 o'clock of the night, or morning, he was murdered, and just before dying raved about somebody he called Ralph of the Red Hand—"

"You, of course, connected the two Ralphs, and the appointment, with the murder, and you were correct as far as Ralph Raymond and Ralph of the Red Hand being one, is concerned."

"This Raymond and Mr. McVeigh were deadly enemies a few years ago. That I know, but what their recent relations have been, I can only surmise. Mr. Bull can inform you on that point."

"Bull! Please explain, Miss Weston—what do you mean?"

"That Mr. Bull and Mr. McVeigh hunted down, or out of that part of the country, a band of Western desperadoes who combined train robbery with counterfeiting and illicit whisky distilling."

"Of this band, Ralph Raymond was the leader, but came East, and is now in New York."

"Mr. Bull knew of Raymond's presence here, as it was he who informed Mr. McVeigh, and as the ex-train robber, counterfeiter, etc., has reformed, (or pretends to have,) I imagine the appointment was to secure the silence of the men who had broken up his business."

"Is Raymond his real name?" asked the Fox.

To the detective's astonishment, Miss Weston blushed slightly while answering:

"It is the name assumed by Ralph on his coming East."

Pretending not to have noticed the sudden access of color in the hitherto pale cheeks of his companion, the detective remarked:

"If the silence this Red Hand sought to secure by bribery were refused, he would be just the style of a ruffian to endeavor to gain his point by force?"

Miss Weston nodded assent, and the Fox continued:

"Then he is the man I must look for."

Miss Weston looked troubled, but made no response until the detective arose saying:

"I must secure this man at once."

"One moment, Mr. Fox!" she called, and as he stopped, continued:

"Is it not possible that he—Raymond—was purchasing immunity at the expense of his former friends, and they discovering the fact too late to prevent the communication, took the only other means of preventing its going further?"

"Quite possible—even probable," replied Fox.

"But, I must not allow him to get out of reach, until I've been satisfied that some of these former friends were in New York on the night of the murder, and that the appointment was not a trap."

Miss Weston bowed submissively, but when the shutting of the street door announced the Fox's departure, she sprang from her chair muttering:

"I was too hasty! I should not have spoken—yet!"

"But, good heavens! To think of one hounding the other, and goading him to desperation!"

"I must take a hand in this game, myself, and the first trick, at all events, must be mine—even at the risk of beating my partners (!)."

CHAPTER IV.

THE BLOODHOUND STRIKES THE SCENT.

LEAVING Miss Weston and the Fox, for the present, we will accompany Mr. Bull.

After the departure of the ambulance bearing the dying detective, the Bloodhound started toward the Bowery.

Passing the corner where the Fox had noticed the suspiciously incurious men standing, the Bloodhound was muttering:

"Yes, it's the work of the old gang, who've nosed out what was going on; but they've made a mistake—blast 'em!"

He quickened his pace with the last words—like a hound suddenly striking the scent, but even as he did so, was stricken from behind and went down like a log.

The loungers had taken him completely off his guard, but had not made as complete a job as they thought, for the Bulldog was able to go about within twenty-four hours after he was brought to the station-house.

After leaving home as described by his sister, Bull went to the hospital, where he learned of Mac's death, and removal of the body.

"That settles it—now I must resign!" he muttered as he started for the undertaker's.

"It's the old gang sure as fate, and we must look sharp or there'll be some more of us knocked out before we can get back at the bloodhounds!"

Thus musing, the Bloodhound arrived at the undertaker's establishment.

"Haven't received anybody from any hospital to-day," was the assistant's reply—truthful though surprising—to Bull's inquiry.

"But your employer himself removed it, and declared it was coming here—hours ago."

"Well, we haven't received it—that's all I know. Look for yourself."

With the tenacity which gained him his name, the Bloodhound did look, but without success.

"Ah! a trick of Fox's!" he muttered as the idea suddenly occurred to him.

Starting off at once, the Bloodhound was in front of Mac's residence about half an hour before the arrival of the hearse and carriage, but he made no attempt to enter.

Although possessing a latch-key, and accustomed to enter at all hours when desirous of consulting Mac, the Bloodhound took up a position opposite the house.

Then followed the arrival of the hearse and carriage, the carrying out of the coffin, and the startling discovery that one of the bearers, apparently, was Mac himself.

"Great Lord!" exclaimed the amazed watcher. "What does it mean? It's some fake—but no, that's impossible!"

After a moment's hesitation he hurried away, muttering:

"I'll try the hospital first. Then I'll go for that undertaker."

"Mac may have pulled through as I did, and this may be a game to get rid of his sup-

posed body, thus throwing them off the scent."

Thus reasoned Bull, as he pursued his way to Chambers Street Hospital.

"I'll have to be careful," he muttered on entering the hospital. "If it is a game, Fox is surely in it, and it won't do for me to spoil it."

Accordingly, on meeting the surgeon who had attended McVeigh, and witnessed his death, the Bloodhound carelessly asked:

"Is there any truth in that newspaper report of the ravings of the man brought in here about 2:15 A. M. yesterday?"

"Just a trifle overdrawn—that's all. Otherwise perfectly correct."

"He was supposed to be dying, wasn't he?"

"He was dying!"

"Oh! I supposed that was some of the 'overdrawn' part of the report."

"No, sir. I saw at once—and said so—that he was dying, and he was dead within two minutes after he began talking."

"Ah, indeed? That was quick work. Anybody claim his body?"

"Yes; an undertaker of the name of Arthur was authorized to take charge of it by the man who accompanied him here."

That was enough for the Bloodhound.

"There is some game going on, and whether Mac is really dead, or merely feigned death, Fox knows all about it."

"I'll see him to-morrow morning, instead of this tricky undertaker."

When attacked the previous night, Bull had escaped Mac's fate by an instinctive plunge forward, which caused the blow to strike almost on his shoulder.

The plunge and half-turn combined, saved his life, and the half-turn gave him a glimpse of one of his assailants.

Shortly after leaving the hospital, the Bloodhound caught sight of the face of this particular assailant—easily recognizable because of his slender, but wiry, figure, and his having but one eye.

The murderous ruffian was passing under a street lamp, with his blind side to the detective, and so failed to recognize the latter.

"Phe-ew! This is luck!" softly exclaimed the delighted detective, and wheeling dropped in behind his man.

Chuckling gleefully as he spoke—Bull jumped on the rear platform of a car, following his man who had got on in front.

After a twenty-minutes' ride, shadowed and shadower left the car, and proceeded across town toward the most fashionable quarter of the city—to the shadow's delight.

"Come, come!" he muttered on perceiving the quarter his game was heading for. "Bull, my boy, you made a pretty good guess."

"Yes, it's the old gang, but this gentleman's a brand new member."

"It don't matter, however. I reckon I can coax an introduction from friend Ralph."

This last seemed to amuse the shadow hugely, but suddenly ceasing his chuckling, he drew closer to the game, and was at the latter's heels when he ascended the stoop of a splendid house.

The man-hunter passed right by at a hurried gait, but when the closing of a heavy door announced the admission of the one-eyed visitor, turned back and walked to the house.

"Strange that such a shrewd fellow as Ralph is, should have such a suspicious character as my friend visit him!" soliloquized Bull.

Looking up at the house as he spoke, Bull saw the parlor suddenly lighted up.

"Ralph has just entered, and I'm going to see how they meet!" he decided, and quickly ascended the stoop.

Bending over the stoop-rail, Bull peeped into the parlor and saw Ralph Raymond, the tenant of the mansion, standing on one side of the center-table, his right hand raised

threateningly, and speaking in an angry tone.

"You wretch!" cried Raymond, raising his voice. "If ever you come to this door again, my servants will hand you over to the police, and I will repeat what you have dared to reveal to me of your murderous deeds! Be-gone!"

Warned by the last word, the Bloodhound jumped over the stoop-rail into the basement just in time to avoid the one-eyed ruffian who rushed through the door, and down the stoop as if his miserable life was at stake.

"Well, I'll be hanged if it doesn't look as if he started in chase of the fleeing ruffian."

"He looked as if he meant every word, and they were red-hot, square words, but who can this fellow be, and who set him on me?"

"Well, I'll locate him to-night, and call on Ralph with some fairy tale to-morrow."

In pursuance of this, the Bloodhound shadowed his man over the same course, until they were again in the neighborhood of the attack upon Mac and himself, and then came a startling discovery.

The one-eyed ruffian had suddenly increased his pace to a dog-trot, and the shadow followed suit just as he was passing under a lamp. An instant later, two long shadows shot ahead showing that there was a man right at Bull's heels.

There was no noise—not a sound but the pattering of Bull's own feet, for "his man," (also running lightly,) was too far away to be heard.

Yet there was the second shadow, and in another moment came a third.

"Running in felt, eh?" muttered the Bloodhound, and with a grim smile:

"Well, gentlemen, I'm ready!"

And wheeling, and pulling his revolver, the detective faced his shadows.

CHAPTER V.

DANGEROUS WORK.

WHEN the Bloodhound wheeled and faced his pursuers, it was with the full expectation of meeting two of the sandbagging gang.

It was for this reason that his revolver was leveled and fired as he turned, but fortunately for the man at whom it was aimed, the sudden whirl round spoiled the accuracy of the shot.

Both of the "Sandbaggers" showed shining revolvers, and the one at whom Bull had fired was about to return the shot, when his companion shouted:

"Don't cheat the hangman! Don't kill him, Ned!"

The Bloodhound's second shot was ready—another instant would have sent it on a now certainly deadly mission—when these strange words fell upon his ear, and he reserved his fire, as did "Ned."

"Now, my boy, we've got you!" coolly declared "Ned's" companion.

The Bloodhound laughed grimly.

"Come now! What's the use of being ugly?" coaxed "Ned," adding:

"We've got to take you, you know, and it depends on yourself—"

"What in blazes are you talking about? Who are you, anyhow?" savagely interrupted Bull, a suspicion of the truth breaking upon him.

"We're officers, and—"

"Blockheads! Confound you, blockheads!" roared the furiously angry detective.

Thrusting his pistol into his pocket as he spoke, Bull threw open his coat thus exposing his shield; and continued:

"Through your wonderful sagacity, I've lost my man! Now, perhaps, you'd like to see my baptismal certificate, and official appointment, before believing yourselves idiots!"

His rage was so great that he could hardly speak, but he was wrong, and realized it, when "Ned" meekly replied:

"It's too bad you lost your man, but we're

not supposed to know every detective on the force—and you were acting suspicious."

"Yes, I suppose I was," promptly acknowledged Bull. "Excuse my French, please, and set it down to my disappointment."

Then, bidding the officers "good-night," he resumed his course toward Water street, being informed as he departed that there were a number of men in plain clothes on the lookout for the sandbaggers—the two he met being among them.

"I'll visit every den in the district!" he muttered between his teeth.

It was a reckless resolution, for he was not in disguise, and knew but one man, while the whole gang undoubtedly knew him.

But Bull was as much bull-dog as bloodhound, and never thought of turning back when once started.

Entering the first place he came upon, the detective called for a hot drink.

It was long past the legal closing hour—in fact approaching the opening hour—but there was a convenient "side door," and the den was in full blast.

Bull was in an ugly mood, and his sharp demand for a drink caused many curious, questioning glances to be directed at him from every part of the room save one—the corner furthest from the detective.

In the corner referred to five men were sitting at a table drinking, and conversing much less noisily than their neighbors.

"Holy Smoker! Pike, there's your man!" exclaimed one of this group, causing the individual addressed to turn and look toward the bar, revealing the fact that the one-eyed thug's name (at present) was Pike.

The Bloodhound had accidentally stumbled upon his game!

Unsuspecting of his man's proximity, the detective was not likely to perceive Pike as the latter was sitting with his back to the bar.

"What's the programme, Whitey?" demanded Pike of the man who had addressed him.

"Why, finish the job of course!" was the savage response.

"Now?"

"Of course! The streets are full o' fly cops, 'n' we kin 'do' him quicker 'n' safer here."

"But Morris (the proprietor) won't stand anny racket—specially wud so many coppers 'round," objected one.

"Can't help himself if you don't spoil it," retorted Whitey.

"Why, don't ye see?" he continued, "when the scrap starts one o' ye kin sit still 'n' turn out the gas as soon as the rest 'r' near enough to jump in, 'n' then it'll be a free fight all around."

"When it's over 'n' he's picked up a stiff, nobody kin tellanythin' about it. I won't be in it, for you mustn't make a move till I make him knock me insensible. See?"

They "saw"—and agreed that the scheme was a good one.

After again cautioning his confederates as to the timing of their movements, Whitey arose and staggered to the bar.

"Hello, Pete!" he exclaimed, addressing Bull, who was sipping his drink, and surveying the crowd. "Goin' t' treat?"

Bull glanced at him sharply, but made no response.

"Well, tell us what time it is, anyhow—if ye have got a clock?" continued Whitey, as if trying to get even by sneering at Bull's chain.

"Time for you to be in jail!" was the prompt reply.

This was the ruffian's opening, and he took advantage of it.

"Ye lie!" he cried with a horrible oath.

A tap would have served the purpose, but Bull picked up Whitey and threw him overhead with a force that rendered any pretense about his fall quite unnecessary.

An instant after pandemonium reigned in the den—men cursing and yelling, and all fighting to get at the door.

The gas had been turned off as arranged; the place was in darkness, and there was a general feeling of alarm.

Whitey had received a crushing fall, but he was not senseless, for as the light went out, Bull's legs were jerked from under him.

As the detective struck the floor, Pike and the others of the murderous gang having waited close at hand, jumped forward to perform their part in the work of finishing the job.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE BLOODHOUND FARED.

WHEN Whitey first addressed the Bloodhound, the latter did not for a moment suspect him to be one of the sandbagging gang; but, as he struck the floor, the Bloodhound guessed the truth.

"The one-eyed fellow is here, and set the gang onto me!"

As this thought flashed through his mind, Bull's outstretched right hand came into contact with the leg of a man who was endeavoring to get up from the floor.

It was Whitey's. The ruffian's fall was no light one, and he had been barely able to carry out his part.

Bull seized the leg and jerked down Whitey alongside of himself; and it was at this instant Pike and the others rushed forward to "finish the job."

Instead, they all but finished Whitey, who soon became unconscious from kicks and blows dealt by the roughs.

"Meant for me!" muttered the dauntless Bull, smiling grimly as he rolled away from his antagonist.

It was all over within a very few minutes, for, as Whitey had observed, the streets were "full o' fly cops," and fearing to attract their attention (too openly) the proprietor of the den hastened to get the gas turned on and lighted—thus quelling the row.

So suddenly was the gas turned on and lighted, that Pike and his companions were caught standing over—and some kicking—the body of their insensible confederate.

"Thunder'n blazes!" cried Pike, while the others stared in silent astonishment, which was increased by the sight of Bull standing near the street door, leaning carelessly against the counter, puffing a cigar.

The Bloodhound was the coolest person in the room—and like ice in the dog-days, his coolness appeared the greater because of the excitement of the others.

Knowing that Pike, at all events, was aware of his identity, and careless of the consequences, he answered the inquiringly astonished stare of the confederates by saying:

"Much obliged to you, gentlemen, but I could have handled him, myself. Was the doing up intended for me?"

Pike hardly knew what to do or say.

To all appearances, the presence of the detective in that particular place at that time was purely accidental.

Should he let the affair drop for the present, or attempt to "finish the job" outside?

While Pike debated this question with himself, several others were unavailingly endeavoring to restore Whitey to consciousness.

Noticing this, the Bloodhound determined on a bold move.

"Landlord!" he called.

"Well, what's eatin' you?"

"Nothing, but you had better call an ambulance, and send that man to the hospital. He's dyin'!"

Whitey's appearance, and the treatment which his confederates knew he had received, would warrant Bull's statement, and there were some startled looks and exclamations among the listeners—not that any one

of them cared two straws about the unconscious man.

But a violent death means a coroner's inquest, and that means—police!

To the landlord, it meant the loss of his license, and he growled:

"Get out—you're crazy! How d'ye know he's dyin'? An' who'n in blazes are ye, anyhow? Come, spit it out!"

"If that man dies without medical aid, I shall see to it that you are held responsible."

"The fellow is a thief, of course, but that's no good reason why he should die for want of medical attendance."

"You are afraid of your license—these people of the House of Detention!"

"Now, to show you how much your license is worth, I'll show you who I am!"

Flinging open his clothing, and displaying his shield, Bull uttered the electric words:

"Central Office!"

Instinctively the crowd fell back, and he continued:

"Now, you call an ambulance, quick, and I'll make your license safe."

"Sure?" eagerly asked the landlord.

"Certainly!"

"Right! Here, you, Sam—began the landlord, when Pike interrupted:

"I'll go!"

He started for the door while speaking, but the Bloodhound had him by the neck in an instant, exclaiming:

"No one leaves here except the landlord, until the ambulance surgeon gives his opinion!"

"If it's death, then I'll want a couple witnesses as to my part in it."

Bull was playing a deep game. He had marked Whitey's four confederates, and intended to bag the lot through the surgeon.

"He can pretend to go out for some instrument, and send the driver for a few policemen. Then, when the five are safe under lock and key, it will be queer if we can't screw the truth out of some of them."

The excuse given was a good one. It looked as if Bull was concerned about his own part in the affair, only, and but one person was not deceived.

"That's all right!"

"Go ahead, Morris!"

"We don't mind a few days t' help ye out!"

These, and similar exclamations, showed how completely the excuse had hoodwinked the crowd, and Morris started immediately.

As the landlord passed through the side door, Pike whispered to one of his confederates, who rushed out, but Bull was after him like lightning.

It was only a simple trap, baited by the fellow who had rushed out—but it worked like a charm.

As the detective jumped through the door, Whitey thrust out his foot, and Bull struck head foremost against the wall.

The blow was a stunning one, and when he recovered consciousness the detective found himself locked in a dark cell!

CHAPTER VII.

RED RALPH'S VISITORS.

WE must leave the Bloodhound, for the present, and accompany the Fox on his visit to Ralph Raymond—about six hours subsequent to the events narrated, in the previous chapter.

"There's something great about that girl," muttered the Fox, as he slowly walked downtown—having ascertained from a Directory that Mr. Raymond was a banker and broker at No. — Wall street.

"She's holding back something—knows more than she has told about this Red Hand-ed gentleman," he continued.

Fox proceeded slowly, musing over the work before him.

He was in no hurry; for the head of a banking and brokerage concern is not apt to

be at his office much before ten o'clock, and Fox had left Miss Weston a little after nine.

Leaving the Fox for the moment, we will call on Mr. Raymond before that gentleman starts down-town.

About 9:30, having breakfasted and looked over a few letters, the banker and broker was about leaving his library, when a servant announced "a gentleman to see you, sir!"

"Won't give any name, sir," continued the servant, "but says it's about 'a matter of vital importance' to you! Them's the words he told me to use."

"Well, send in this important individual."

The visitor proved to be a slender, handsome young man, with black hair and mustache—and blue eyes.

"Mr. Raymond," he began, "I've something of importance to tell you, but before doing so must know the result of your interview with McVeigh!"

The ex-highwayman was a man of iron nerve, but this cool demand both angered and alarmed him.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "I don't know what you are talking about!"

"Oh, yes you do; and unless you tell me—and tell me on your oath—the result of the interview had with McVeigh, the detective, on the 24th, at 10:30, I will keep my information to myself."

Involuntarily, unconsciously, the banker's hand sought his hip, while his eyes blazed like a lion at bay.

The visitor shook his head warningly, and in a tone that was almost sad, remarked:

"No, no, Mr. Raymond! You are in New York—now, and that would simply seal your fate!"

Ralph Raymond's face now assumed some of its old-time ferocious expression. The mask dropped, and the genial, benevolent-looking banker became the Western desperado.

Striding to the door, he closed and locked it, and then fiercely demanded:

"Who and what are you?"

"Again, Mr. Raymond, let me remind you that this is neither Montana nor Missouri, Kentucky nor Kansas—but enough of this!"

"Will you tell me what I wish to know, or must I leave without fulfilling the friendly mission upon which I came?"

The confident tone, and undaunted demeanor of the young man, appeared to puzzle as well as alarm the banker.

"You will not tell who you are?—what you are?" he asked.

"No, except that I am your friend, until I leave this house."

The banker paced the library—not hurriedly, like one alarmed, but calmly and thoughtfully, as if debating some important question.

Suddenly, as if having decided upon a course of action, Raymond paused at the door, unlocked it, and quietly remarked:

"You may go, sir, or stay and say your say, as you please."

Notwithstanding his quiet demeanor, there was a dangerous glitter in the banker's eyes.

There was an equally dangerous look in the visitor's as he arose from his chair, saying:

"Remember—'tis your own decision!"

Before the speaker had reached the hall door, Raymond called:

"Quick, Manuel! After that fellow, and do not leave him until you have him safe in the old house!"

"Si, senor!" and the slender, swarthy-faced man who responded to the call was hurrying away, when Raymond stopped him.

"Be careful of him—do not hurt him until we know what he knows."

The Mexican nodded significantly, and hurried away. He had seen the visitor

through a peep-hole in the door opening into a small room adjoining the library, and was in time to catch sight of the latter as he turned into Fifth avenue.

"I wonder who, and what, that fellow is?" muttered Raymond after Manuel's departure.

"I would have answered his question, but that Manuel was, luckily, within reach. He will certainly trap him, and then there will be little trouble about the rest."

The strange visitor had delayed the banker much beyond his usual time, and he was barely in his office when a clerk announced:

"Gentleman outside, sir, wishes to see you—name of Smith?"

"Smith—what Smith? Do you know him?"

"No, sir. He looks like a hod-carrier in his Sunday clothes, and says his business—"

"Send him in!" hurriedly interrupted the banker, looking strangely agitated.

"Mr. Smith," of course, was the Fox, disguised in the every-day disguise of McVeigh.

But the clerk's description had spoiled the scheme, and when the Fox entered the private office, Raymond exclaimed:

"Ah! Up to your old tricks, eh? Couldn't for the life of me make out who Mr. Smith was."

"Well, Mac, how have you decided?"

The banker's tone, on seeing Fox, was that of pleasant surprise.

Assuming Mac's peculiar tone and manner, Fox half-closed his eyes, but kept keen watch of the banker's face, while answering:

"Faith, it's puzzled I am what 't' do."

The banker's eyes gleamed, but whether with anger or pleasure the watcher could not decide, for the next instant Raymond was calmly saying:

"Well, it's all I can do, and certainly a fair offer. You could do no better by going to law, though of course, it would ruin me—and that makes it look like blackmail!"

The speaker paused as if expecting a reply, but the Fox remained silent—for obvious reasons—and the banker asked:

"What does my niece say? You have heard from her, of course?"

This was worse than the first question, and, moreover, was a double-barreled one.

Fox's knowledge of McVeigh's way of answering one question by asking another, enabled him to keep up his end of the conversational fencing-match.

"Just guess, now. What d'ye think she said?" he counterquestioned.

"Oh, hang it! why don't you answer me? I suppose she left it in your hands?"

"Yes, faith, ye struck it!"

"Well, I'm really glad, Mac!" heartily declared the banker. "For you and I will soon reach a settlement, whereas, if my niece had to be consulted, we might never do so."

"Now, I'm very busy this morning, and would like to meet you and talk it over to-night, say about nine o'clock."

"I'll be there," answered Fox, and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

"RAYMOND & CO."—MISS WESTON.

RAYMOND & Co.'s banking and brokerage office occupied the basement and first floor of one of the few small, old-fashioned buildings still remaining in West street.

The firm was quite a new one in the street, and its members comparatively unknown in the financial world, but it did some business, had well-furnished offices, and a respectable number of clerks.

Adjoining the dingy building, nearly half of which was occupied by Raymond & Co., was the palatial structure of the — National Bank, which did a tremendous business.

Fox had hardly left Mr. Raymond, when Mr. Jones—the "Co."—entered the private office, and asked:

"Who the deuce was that?"

"He's a man whom I'd give five thousand to see dead!"

"Why in thunder don't ye give it out?"

"I did—and it was botched!"

"Who handled it?"

"See here, Mason!" exclaimed Raymond rather excitedly, "do you want to handle it for half as much more?"

"There was another man in it, but he was done for this morning!"

"Certainly! Let me have a couple hundred, and I'll see people to-night who won't botch it."

"To-night won't do! Go now! That is the most dangerous man I've ever met, and must be silenced immediately! Sit down, and I'll post you."

And these very queer heads of a banking-house conversed for fully a half hour; after which "Mr. Jones" transferred a roll of bills to his pockets, and arose from his chair, saying:

"Very well, I'll attend to this fellow, but explain my absence to Adams and the others, for I shall be badly wanted."

"Are we nearly through, then?"

"Yes, we'll be into the vault within two or three nights!"

"But we are to wait until sure of a heavy haul—some Saturday?"

"That's the agreement."

"Yes, curse the luck! Otherwise we might let this fellow go."

"But, no! He knows me—too much of me—and must go!"

"Don't you worry about him," remarked Mr. Jones as he left the office.

Fox meantime had started homeward, intending to ascertain whether Miss Weston knew anything of Raymond's niece which would help him to play his part during the evening interview, when suddenly an idea occurred to him, and he exclaimed:

"By Jove, it's the girl herself! Now, I understand her coloring this morning."

"I'm a stranger and she's naturally bashful about revealing her relationship to Red Handed Ralph, though willing enough to assist in punishing him, if guilty."

He had sought the banker, half satisfied that the latter was the cause of Mac's death. Now, he was inclined to think that his dead friend had discovered some fraud in connection with property belonging to Miss Weston, and, acting for her, was pressing Raymond for settlement.

Arriving home, or what he now called home, the detective inquired for Miss Weston.

"She went out right after you," replied Mrs. Morgan.

It struck Fox that this was a favorable opportunity for making some inquiries, which he would not care to put to Miss Weston herself.

"Do you know if Miss Weston has any money or property coming to her?"

"Not that I ever heard of—or she either," replied Mrs. Morgan, adding:

"Her parents were quite poor, and both died while she was an infant."

"And then?"

"Then an aunt took care of her until—until she was able to take care of herself."

"I'll ask the girl herself," Fox thought, and requesting the landlady to let him know as soon as Miss Weston returned, proceeded to his rooms.

As he never knew how long he would have to go without rest when once on foot, Fox made it a rule to take rest whenever opportunity offered, and on reaching his apartments threw himself upon a lounge, and five minutes later he was asleep.

Mrs. Morgan had been trained to obey Mac's instructions to the letter, and would not have aroused Fox until next morning, had he slept that long. As it was, the clock was striking four when the detective jumped up.

With an angry exclamation, Fox descended to the parlor floor, intending to scold Mrs. Morgan for her forgetfulness, but was forestalled by the latter's:

"Oh, I thought you would never waken up!"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Oh, I'm afraid something's happened, Louise, but didn't dare disturb you."

"Why, is it possible she hasn't returned?"

"No, sir, and—oh, dear! what can have happened her?"

Anxious to relieve the distressed woman, Fox remarked that Miss Weston might have called on some friends.

"No, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Morgan. "She said she would be back within an hour, and besides—"

"Besides what?" asked the detective, wondering what had caused the landlady to stop in such confusion as she exhibited.

The question only served to increase Mrs. Morgan's confusion, and Fox said:

"Come, madam! If not an old friend, I am at least no stranger. You are keeping something back. Without knowing what it is, I cannot properly advise you."

Thus urged and encouraged, the landlady answered:

"You are right, sir, no doubt, and I will tell you. Louise went out dressed as man!"

"Where to?" asked the Fox, repressing a strong inclination to indulge in a whistle.

"Oh, if I only knew! If I had only asked her!" exclaimed the distressed woman.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BANKER AND THE FOX.

AT nine o'clock, as per appointment, Fox rung the door-bell of Mr. Ralph Raymond's handsome residence, and was admitted by the banker himself.

The detective was not feeling particularly happy. He had been unable to find any trace of Miss Weston, although all the police stations in New York, Brooklyn and Jersey City had been communicated with.

Bull, too, was still missing from home, and nothing had been heard from him at Police Headquarters, which worried the Fox more than the other disappearance.

"The Fox, the Fox!" muttered the detective as he pulled the banker's bell, "I feel more like a fool!"

The banker received the detective warmly, and invited him into the library, saying:

"We can discuss matters there without being disturbed, or overheard."

Entering the luxuriously furnished library, Fox saw a box of cigars and a tray with bottles and glasses upon the center-table.

The conversation opened dangerously:

"Did you learn all you wanted, where I sent you the other night?" asked Raymond.

"No."

"Indeed? You surprise me!" exclaimed the banker, but he overdid the "surprise act," and like lightning came the suspicion to the lynx-eyed detective:

"I was right at first! This fellow is concerned in Mac's death, though he thinks the poor fellow escaped."

"What was wrong?" continued Raymond.

"Oh, I got into a bit of a row that med me put it off for a while."

Raymond smiled slightly, and in McVeigh's true style, Fox retorted:

"Faith ye needn't laugh! Be jabbers, me head waz nearly smashed in—an' be the same token, it looked quarely like as if I wuz sint there for that purpose!"

"Why, you do not believe—" began Raymond.

"No, I don't believe anythin'," interrupted "Mac," in his usual style, "but I'm thinkin' it's mighty quare—that's all!"

"That's all" meant a great deal in Mac's mouth, as Raymond well knew, and the keen observer quickly saw that he was getting his man "rattled"—as it is termed.

Raymond was quick to perceive the disad-

vantage he was fighting at, and, moreover, had a wholesome dread of McVeigh's powers, both mental and physical.

"Why don't you give him his dose when he calls at the house to-night?" Mason had asked during the conversation in Raymond & Co.'s private office.

"Bah! Why, Mason, every man Jack of us would be under lock and key within twenty-four hours, if he failed to return from my house within a stated time!

"You don't know him! He's a fiend!

"Before coming to me to-night, he will have left complete details of where he is going, for what purpose, who I am, and all about me—and enough to spoil the game it has cost us so much time, trouble and cash to carry through almost to success."

"Then how can we dare touch him at all?" wonderingly asked Mason.

"That's one of his peculiarities. He's the soul of honor, and the moment he is out of my house, will send a telegram to burn the letter he has left as a safeguard—if he is going elsewhere himself."

"But how can we be sure of that?" questioned Mason. "It will never do to endanger the big job."

"I know what I'm talking about. Twice he has held press copies of his 'safeguard' (as he calls it) in my face, and defied me to lay a finger on him—though he walked right into our headquarters, and was armed only with a derringer.

"Each time he promised destruction of the 'safeguard.' We watched him, and being delayed the first time, he went as if his life depended upon it, to wire its destruction."

"By the Eternal! I'd have to keep faith with such a man!" admiringly exclaimed Mason.

"I can't afford to!" coolly returned Raymond. "It might endanger the big job."

That settled the question. Heart and soul Mason was wrapped up in the "big job," which was nothing more or less than robbing the — National Bank!

As we have stated, the Fox saw that he was getting his man "rattled," and improved the opportunity by saying:

"It'll be a purty dangerous piece o' work for all concerned, if you an' me don't come t'some sort uv an undherstandin' t'night."

"See here Mac! You're a square man—make your own terms."

"No, make yer best offer—go over the whole matther, an' I'll judge of it ez ye go along—miss nothin', favor nothin'."

Slowly, and as if weighing every word, the banker spoke for fully fifteen minutes, and when he finished the listener was fairly paralyzed with astonishment.

"Well, what do you think of it now?" asked Raymond, seeing "Mac" apparently buried in thought.

"I dunno but I'll take yer offer," replied the detective, pulling himself together.

"Good!" exclaimed the banker. "I'll have the papers ready to-morrow evening, and if you will call then, we can close the matter."

"All right," returned the detective as he prepared to depart. "I'll call about nine."

"Shall you go there, or home first?" asked Raymond, referring to a visit, (which "Mac" would naturally be anxious to make as soon as possible,) to a man supposed to be possessed of valuable information concerning Miss Weston.

"Home—no, I'll go see this man," replied Fox, hardly knowing what reply to make.

"Still follow your custom of sending word home?" carelessly questioned the banker.

"Yes," was the absent response, and the detective departed.

Raymond lighted a cigar after the detective's departure, and seating himself in a chair before the grate calmly remarked:

"Well, I guess that bloodhound will trouble me no more. Now, what of Manuel and his man?"

Fox, meantime, had started down-town, thinking over the strange story he had heard. He was heading for the abode, or resort, of the supposed man with the information, partly because he had said he would go that night, and partly because the place was in the neighborhood of the murder of his friend.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the Fox jumped off the car, and started through New Chambers street for Water, moving at a leisurely gait, thinking over what he had just heard, and of what was before him.

Had he the slightest suspicion of the latter—of what he was about to encounter—the Fox would have exercised some of the cunning to which he was indebted for the name.

But the Fox—for once—had had the wool pulled over his eyes, and walked plump into the trap prepared for him by "Raymond & Co!"

CHAPTER X.

A TRAP AND HOW IT WORKED.

THE den to which Mac had been originally directed, was the same into which the Bloodhound had strayed.

In accordance with the second plan of disposing of "Mac," the detective was allowed to reach this den unmolested.

Once inside the detective's fate was sealed.

"He must never leave there alive!"

That was the order—the only instructions given by Mason to the leader of the murderous gang he had employed.

A description of "Mac" was, of course, furnished, and he was not more than within the dive before he was recognized.

"Well, cully, w'ot sort o' trouble are ye lookin' for?" demanded the bartender.

"It's not a b'y—it's a man I'm lookin' for!" His name is Mudd! Quare sort uv a name, isn't it? but it's the wan I'm t' ask for."

"Who's lookin' for me?" demanded a voice from behind the grinning group gathered about the detective.

The latter noted the wondering looks of the others, as the man claiming the name of Mudd, pushed forward the bar.

"Well, what d'ye want?" asked Mr. Mudd as he stood before Fox.

"To have a private conversation wud ye, if you're the Mither Mudd that knew a Colonel Scott," replied the detective.

"I'm the man—the Mudd!"

"Thin, if you're the Mudd, I hope ye'll excuse me for sayin' ye look a thrifle dusty—just dhry. So, we'll all have somethin' liquid."

The general invitation to drink helped to increase the fun caused by the detective's speech, Mr. Mudd appearing to enjoy it as much as any of the others.

"Now, for business! What can I do for you?" exclaimed Mudd after the drinks were disposed of.

"Where can we talk privately?" counter-questioned Fox, as he sized up the other.

Mr. Mudd was simply a decoy, and he was selected because of his education, and his knowledge of legal affairs.

In response to the detective's request for privacy, the decoy led the way through the long, hall-like back room, and passing out at the rear, entered another house.

This second house was a dismal-looking, two-story-and-a-half structure, which the Fox viewed with suspicion, and stopping as they entered the narrow space between the buildings, asked:

"Where the divil are ye ladin' me?"

"This is where circumstances compel me to live—to exist! Miserable as it is, it is the only privacy I have to offer you."

It was well worded, and acted, and deceived even the cunning Fox, who thinking he had hurt his companion's feelings, replied:

"Poverty's no crime! Go ahead!"

Mudd promptly obeyed, leading the way into a small room on the ground floor.

Mason evidently knew his men, when guaranteeing that they would not botch the job. Everything had been foreseen, and everything was in readiness when Fox entered the room—the death-trap!

There was a small table in the center of the apartment, on one side of which was a chair, and on the board in front of it the remains of a frugal meal—a couple of crusts of bread, and the rind of a piece of cheese.

"My dinner!" said Mudd, nodding toward the fragments with a deprecating smile, at the same time waving his visitor to the chair—the only one in the room.

Besides the chair and table, there was a mattress lying on the floor in one corner of the room, and a soap-box in the other.

And all this theatrical display was because of the impression made upon Mason by Raymond's repeated warnings of the almost superhuman shrewdness and acuteness of the man to be disposed of, as well as of the desperate nature of the weapons he was liable to resort to, should he detect the slightest sign of treachery.

A bright idea struck one of the pair who had undertaken the job—Mudd being merely their decoy—their tool, as they were Mason's.

"See here, Mike! What's the matter with makin' ten—yes, fifteen thousand out o' this job? A party that's so anxious as to pay five t' get this detective out o' the way can pay more—an' we can make him, if we work right!"

"How?" asked the other in astonishment.

"Easy enough! Find out who Mason's party is, and then threaten to let 'our man' loose on him if he don't come down with the dust."

"You've a big head, Jake," ironically remarked Mike. "But did ye ever hear about catchin' yer rabbit before ye cook him?"

"That's all right—I can fix that, too! First thing to be done is get our man in to that little room we've used so often, back of Morris's, and then drop him through the trap—"

"Guess you're forgettin' somethin' ain't ye? What about that dynamite?"

"Don't interrupt me! I know what I'm talking about," warmly retorted Jake.

"Go ahead!"

"Well, once we have him over the trap, it's 'all day' with him."

"The fall to the floor of the cellar is about twenty feet. Well, we'll set to work, build a tank under the trap, fill it with very thin mortar, and, when he's just ready to come through, mix in plenty of plaster of Paris!"

"When he drops, we can see that he goes down as far as his neck—and, then if he had a ton of dynamite, we can laugh at him!"

Seizing his confederate's hand, Mike wrung it, while in murderous admiration he exclaimed:

"You have got a big head, Jake. I ain't in it with ye!"

The trap and tank were duly prepared and tested, Mudd was secured and instructed as to the part he was to play, and then came the victim.

So well a concocted story had Raymond told in connection with property of which Miss Weston had been defrauded, that, like McVeigh, the Fox was unsuspecting of any trap in visiting the place given as the resort of the man possessing valuable information, —and where that man could be found only at night.

Now, seated over the trap that was intended to end his earthly career, Fox asked:

"You are possessed of some information regarding property belonging to Miss Weston, are you not, Mr. Mudd?"

The latter nodded assent. He had seated himself on the soap-box near the corner, and had twice given the signal that the victim was on the trap—a stamp of the foot.

"Will you sell it—and for how much?" continued the detective.

"I don't know---that depends on who you represent."

Fearing the signal had not been heard, the decoy arose while speaking, and stamped violently on the floor.

At best the room was a very small one, and when the decoy gave the signal for the third time, he took a few steps forward to avoid suspicion, and was almost at the edge of the trap when it was sprung.

Tested two hours before, the trap had worked noiselessly and instantaneously, but when the first and second signals were given it refused to budge, and when it obeyed the third, it was with a slight warning creaking that, in connection with Mudd's stamping, was sufficient for the quick-witted Fox.

"You treacherous hound!" he cried, bounding from his seat toward Mudd.

At that moment the trap sprung downward, and both men fell backward into the yawning pit prepared for the detective!

CHAPTER XI.

A PERILOUS POSITION.

NOTWITHSTANDING the ruffian Jake's boasted faith in the tank of mortar, as a preventive of danger from the dynamite "Mac" was said to carry, he deemed it prudent to adopt a suggestion made by his confederate while in the cellar, awaiting the intended victim.

"See here," said Mike, "what's the matter with hitchin' a rope onto the bolt spring? Then, we can pull the trap from the other end o' the cellar, an' if anythin' does go off, we won't get the worst of it, anyhow."

This was agreeable to Jake, and the idea was adopted.

When the first and second signals were given, the murderous scoundrels were dismayed by finding that the trap refused to answer to the tugs on the rope.

Then came Mudd's third, loudest and most impatient, signal, but this time the already eased bolt shot back, the trap was sprung, and the thin mortar splashed all over the cellar.

A dull, heavy noise, as of a body striking the wall of the tank, accompanied the splashing of the mortar, and the watchers shrunk back in terror, expecting an explosion.

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" exclaimed Mike, finding that no explosion followed. "I'll be hanged if that wasn't touch 'n' go!"

"Yes—he must have struck on one side. It's a miracle the stuff didn't go off," returned the other, wiping the sweat from his brow. "Let's go see how it worked?"

Jake assented, and together they cautiously approached the deadly tank, picking their way in the darkness, through fear of using the lantern they had brought for the purpose.

"I can't see him!" whispered Jake, as they stood peering over the edge of the tank.

"Neither can I. Strike a match!"

Jake obeyed, and by the dim, flickering light of the match, a foot was seen sticking above the surface of the fast stiffening mortar.

"Head-foremost!" muttered Mike.

"Yes; that kills my plan. You'd better go at once to tell Mason, for I'm anxious to finger the rest o' the dust—and I'm goin' to skip when I do!"

"So'm I!" declared Mike, as they started to ascend the ladder.

Both were mistaken, however; for neither "skipped," though the blood-money was paid as agreed—that is, on proof of death.

"Where the deuce is Mudd?" exclaimed Jake when, on reaching the trap room, it was found deserted.

"Guess he must 've heard us talkin' of the bloody dynamite 'n' took a sneak out t' the bar as soon as the trap was pulled."

The trap-door was still open, but it was too dark to see anything below, so, closing it, they entered the bar-room.

"Where's Flood?" inquired Mike, giving the decoy's real name.

"Why, I thought he wuz wid youse fellers," replied the bartender. "He ain't come back since he went into de Vault wid ye."

"Must've got a pretty bad scare," remarked Mike, grinning at his confederate, but the latter did not respond in kind.

Instead, Jake looked troubled, and calling his confederate aside, asked:

"How do we know that it wasn't Flood went down, instead o' the other one?"

"Aw, don't be an ijit!" ejaculated Mike. "D'ye t'ink Flood'd be fool enough t' git onter de trap, an' give de office t' drop himself?"

"No; it don't look likely."

"An' even if he did, ain't ther' a man in de tank—an' who's goin' t' say it ain't de right one?"

"That's so," agreed Jake. "We've got to show Mason the body, but the plaster's set by this time, and he'll be satisfied with the foot—he'll have t' be!"

"Of course! Will I go for him?"

"No; you stay round and look out for Flood. He must have gone out through the alley."

Fully an hour elapsed before Jake returned to the den.

The murderer was accompanied by two men, one of whom—Mason—was known to most of the "crooks" in the den at the time as a superior sort of a being.

Accompanying this distinguished individual was a heavily bearded stranger—bearded so much, in fact, that hardly anything more than the tip of the nose, and a pair of piercingly brilliant black eyes were visible.

The three walked through the den, followed by Mike who joined the party in the rear house, where Mason suggested:

"Guess we had better have some drinks and cigars to cover our business here? It'll look like a consultation."

He looked inquiringly at his companion—the stranger—and when the latter nodded assent, continued:

"Here, Mike! You order some drinks—anything—and cigars, and three chairs."

This order was promptly fulfilled and then locking the door, Mason asked:

"Now, where's your proof?"

"In the cellar," answered Jake.

"Very well, show a light there—and you, Mike, stay here to be certain that we have no skeleton-key spectators, or listeners."

Mike nodded, and picking up the hand lamp Jake led the way into an adjoining room, and thence to the cellar, where, holding the light over the edge of the tank, he said:

"There's your proof, gentlemen!"

The "gentlemen" stared in astonishment. They had to stand on tip-toe to see the proof at all, for the tank was nearly six feet in depth, and the foot only just over the surface.

After feeling the already stiff crust of the mortar, and plaster of paris, Mason wonderingly inquired:

"What in thunder does this mean? It's as hard as a brick!"

Jake explained the combination that the tank contained, adding:

"We expected him to go in feet first."

Mason looked inquiringly at the stranger, who shook his head dubiously, but said nothing.

"Curious way you took to do the job."

"There was nothing said about how it was to be done!"

"No, that's so; but how in thunder do we—do I know that's my man?"

It was Jake's own question of an hour before, but now he was prepared for it, answering by using the same arguments Mike had used with him, reinforced by an offer to prove by the bartender, and others, that a

man of Mac's description had entered "The Vault," but had not returned from it.

When Jake finished his argument, Mason again looked inquiringly at the stranger.

Evidently the latter was the man to be suited—the real employer—Raymond!

The latter did not respond for several minutes, being apparently engaged in debating the question. Then he said:

"It's unnecessary. The story is evidently a straight one."

Mason nodded and turned toward the ladder, when the other suddenly asked:

"Where is the third man—the decoy?"

"Off on another job—we paid him," promptly lied Jake.

"Hum. Well, I suppose it's all right; but you must get this body out, and be ready to show up by to-morrow night."

"But we were to get our 'stuff' to-night."

"And you will. Isn't a hundred more good enough pay for digging out that body?"

"Oh, yes! Certainly!"

"Very well; then do as I say, get it out!"

"Right you are, sir! I'll have it ready for ye any time ye say to-morrow night."

"At twelve o'clock—midnight. You may expect us then."

"Very good. I'll be on hand."

"And I," warned Mason.

"And I," muttered a man lying on the opposite side of the tank.

There was a grim humor about the third speech, inasmuch as the speaker was unable to move, and had every prospect of being killed, and buried right where he was, if discovered.

The discovery was not made, however—not at that time at all events—the murderer, his employer, and the go between, all quitting the cellar without the slightest suspicion that the man they supposed to be dead—smothered in the tank—had overheard all that passed!

But the detective's situation was a most dangerous one. He had escaped the mortar through striking the edge of the tank, but at the cost of a sprained ankle, and a right arm that felt as if it was broken—useless at all events.

Discovery now meant unresisting death, and yet how could he hope to escape the search certain to follow the other discovery—that it was the decoy who had been killed?

The situation was one of deadly peril.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CURSE—THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER.

WHEN the three men returned to the room above, the balance of the blood-money was paid over.

"And, I'd give half as much more to have seen the face belonging to the foot," uneasily declared the stranger, thus revealing the fact already apparent—that he was the actual employer.

Both the murderous tools looked astonished at this declaration—proving, as it did, the truth of Jake's assertion—that there was more money than had been offered to be made out of the "job."

"We'll start to dig him out right off, if ye like!" offered Mike.

He was eager for the money, and had no doubt of the identity of the victim, but Jake did not feel so sure, and was relieved when the stranger answered:

"No, I can't wait. Be sure to have it ready to-morrow night."

Turning to Mason, the speaker signified his readiness to leave the place, and in the same uneasy manner added:

"I'll never rest contented until I see that man's grave—and him in it!"

"Gad! You're getting nervous in your old age," observed Mason, sarcastically.

"I've been so ever since reading of that scene in the hospital—that curse."

"But, confound it! the fellow didn't die at all! It was some fake of his."

"So it seems—must be—yet I can't get rid of that uneasy feeling."

"Come, have a drink! You'll hoodoo the job, if ye get talking that way."

"I can't help it! It seems as if there was something hanging over us—as if the job itself was to be a failure."

Raymond, for, of course he was the stranger, spoke in a half hearted way that seemed to irritate his confederate.

"Oh, blast your forebodings!" exclaimed Mason. "That sort of talk don't sound much like Ralph of the Red Hand!"

They had left the two tools dividing the blood-money, and were standing in the narrow space separating the houses while talking.

The conversation was unguardedly loud—especially so on Mason's part, and it was overheard both within and without.

Within the "Vault," the two ruffians exchanged significant glances on hearing the name, and the reference to the "job—the big job."

Without—in the alley through which the decoy was supposed to have fled, and not five feet from the confederates, was another listener.

Little dreaming of the deadly fruit soon to grow from their words, Raymond and his companion left the yard, and, acting on the latter's suggestion, entered the saloon.

"Look here, Mike!" whispered Jake, as he saw the others leaving. "We got a big thing in this, if we work it right."

"Well?"

"Well, we must find out what this job is, and then, even if the tank don't pan out all right—and somehow I feel shaky over it—we'll be safe to keep the dust we got to-night, and mebbe squeeze out a little more."

"How's the game t' be worked?"

"You shadow Mason, and I'll follow the other one. Then we'll find out what their game is, and locate this Ralph as well—See?"

"I'll bet it's some bank!"

"Shouldn't wonder a bit. You look after Mason until you're sure, and when you are, come back. If I'm not here, wait for me."

"The curse is beginning to work," muttered the man in the alley, for instead of profiting by the example of the superior ruffians, Jake and Mike spoke in ordinarily loud tones.

"Yes, the curse is beginning to work. The leaders are ready to find fault with each other, and the tools are trying to get a grip on them."

"Now, to find out who it is that is to be dug out!"

"Can it be possible that the Fox, too, has been murdered? That his cunning has been overmatched by these villains?"

Jake and his confederate were passing out while the stranger was thus soliloquizing, and with the last word the latter entered the vault.

A quick, searching glance revealed the trap-door, and picking up the lamp still burning on the table, the stranger sought and soon found the ladder leading to the cellar.

The discovery of the tank, and of the foot sticking out of it, revealed the subject of the conversation overheard, and the stranger's teeth gritted at the sight.

"Ha! can it be that he missed that point?" muttered the stranger, holding the lamp close to the projecting limb.

"No, no! His make-up was too perfect to miss such an important point! The shoes themselves are ordinary ones!"

As the searcher uttered this in tones of intense relief, the noise of footsteps above reached him, and quickly extinguishing the light, he secreted himself behind a bale of stolen goods.

In a few moments, two men descended—talking rather loudly and somewhat angrily.

The new-comers were Whitey and Pike, and the listener chuckled, notwithstanding his danger, on hearing them disputing.

"Tell ye wot it is, Pike—you're gittin' too 'light' for this business!" declared Whitey, as they entered the cellar.

"No more'n you are! You're too thick t' see the danger o' holdin' this chap—specially when he's supposed to be dead, an' we waitin' for the rest o' the dust!"

"Well, ye kin wait a day longer, I guess. If that duck don't talk to-night, he'll be a stiff before mornin'!"

"Good enough! That's the talk!"

"Glad ye'r satisfied," growled Whitey, and as they moved toward the other end of the cellar asked:

"Remember, now, if this duck gives away what he's wanted out o' the way for, you ain't goin' t' let on t' the rest o' the gang?"

"Of course, not! If there's anythin' in it, we kin take care of it."

"More treachery!" chuckled the stranger as he stole after the ruffians.

The cellar was long, and of course dark, but the light from the lantern carried by Pike, served to guide the unknown until an inner vault was reached, and here the ruffians stopped before an iron-barred door.

Whatever the original purpose of this strong room was, now it was being used as a prison, as the silent watcher saw by the lantern light, and this was quickly confirmed by Whitey's hoarse command to somebody within:

"Get up, blast ye, get up!"

There was no response, and shaking the door, Whitey repeated the order even more fiercely, but still without effect.

"Mebbe the bloke's croaked!" suggested Pike.

"Shammin'! Git a stick 'n' poke him—good 'n' hard!"

There were plenty of river-thieves among those who made use of the vault, and a boat-hook was hanging close by.

Seizing this with fiendish pleasure, Pike thrust it between the bars, driving the point into one of the prisoner's legs, and calling forth a surprised cry of pain.

"It wuz wood he was expectin'!" chuckled the ruffian noting the surprised tone.

"Give him another prod!"

Ever ready—eager for any cowardly, cruel work, Pike made another thrust, but the prisoner avoided it, and demanded:

"You cowardly hounds! why don't you kill me at once?"

"Because we've better use for ye!" retorted Whitey, with a hoarse laugh.

"What is it you want?"

"Information. We got everythin' else ye had, except yer clothes."

"Well?"

"Well, ye kin have a drink 'n' a bite, if you'll talk. If ye don't, you'll get that boat-hook till ye'r on'y fit for the sewer."

"Give me the drink!" eagerly exclaimed the prisoner.

"Go up for that bottle," directed Whitey, but Pike feared treachery, and refused, saying:

"Let him talk, first."

The other understood him, but laughed instead of being offended.

"All right!" he said, and turning to the prisoner asked:

"What was your game in comin' here, 'n' why is a certain party anxious t' get rid o' ye?"

"Where's that drink?" demanded the prisoner in a hoarse voice—dry and thick.

"My partner says you've got t' talk first, 'n' drink after."

"Give me a drink at once, or say you won't! Don't torture me!"

"You talk, 'n' you'll get all you want."

Something in the speaker's tone partly revealed the ominous meaning of the words, and the prisoner exclaimed:

"There is no faith in such cowardly dogs

as you! You've come here simply to torture me—begone!"

"Holy murder! He's looney!" exclaimed Pike.

"Give him a jab with the pole! Then, git him a good stiff horn, 'n' then we'll give him a drink out o' the bottle—if he comes around all right 'n' talks. Understand?"

"Yes—more delay, danger, 'n' want o' dust!" growled Pike.

"You do as I tell ye!" ordered Whitey, in a menacing tone, and his confederate hurried away—almost stumbling over the mysterious stranger.

"It's Bull, and he's delirious!" muttered the latter, as lying flat on the ground, he watched the scene with the prisoner.

In a few minutes, Pike returned with a glass of whisky and water in one hand, and a black bottle in the other.

"Here! Now, pull yerself together, 'n' I'll give ye another drink if you'll talk," said Whitey, passing the glass to the prisoner.

The latter seized the drink, swallowed it eagerly, and then cried:

"Now, do your worst!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO GRAND SURPRISES.

WHITEY responded to the prisoner's defiance with a horrible oath, while his confederate made a thrust with the boat-hook, crying:

"Let's finish him!"

"No! Give him a chance t' know what's goin' on."

But the fury of murder was raging within Pike, and instead of obeying he made another desperate thrust at Bull.

As the thrust was made, the lantern was tumbled over and extinguished.

"Now, you bloody idiot!" yelled Whitey. "You go 'n' get that filled 'n' lighted inside of three minutes, or I'll break yer thick head!"

"I didn't do it!" protested Pike.

"Ye lie! Get, now—quick!"

The leader's tone was menacing, and his confederate, grumbling and stumbling, made for the ladder.

Whitey heard him ascending the ladder, (still grumbling,) and smiled to himself as he muttered:

"The skunk'd go back on me if he dared! I'll have a look at this chap while he's away—mebbe he'll say somethin' now."

Producing a dark lantern as he spoke, the ruffian turned the light upon the prisoner, but the latter appeared to be delirious—raving and muttering as he sat in the corner of his cell.

"He is out of his head, 'n' we can't risk keepin' him any longer. I'll have to give it up, an' give him his dose—"

A light footstep sounded behind the cold-blooded scoundrel, causing him to say:

"Get yer bottle ready, Pike! We'll have t' give him his medicine t'-night, after all."

The next instant the cold muzzle of a revolver was pressing against Whitey's temple, while the mysterious stranger hissed:

"Not a murmur, as you value your life!"

The surprised, startled ruffian obeyed, and the other continued:

"Keep that light on the door. Where is the key?"

Hoping, and expecting Pike to return every moment, Whitey made no reply, and, as if understanding the reason the stranger added:

"Your companion can't get down! I've taken away the ladder."

"Make no mistake! If he tries to come down, I'll kill you as I would a mad-dog! I'd do it anyhow, but that I'm saving you for the hangman!"

The new-made prisoner shuddered. The awful ferocity of the speaker's voice appalled him, and for the next few minutes he shook at

the slightest sound, fearing it might indicate the return of his confederate.

"Stand perfectly still! Ha! These are keys!" exclaimed the stranger, touching a jingling bunch in Whitey's trousers. "Now open that door!"

The ruffian did not hesitate when the captor added:

"This is a self-cocking six shooter, and my fingers are just itching to pull the trigger! Don't delay; it's liable to go off at any instant, and then I'd have to open the door myself."

The words were spoken in a quiet, mocking way that terrified the listener more than the fiercest of threats, and the door was promptly unlocked.

As the bolt shot back, the man within sprung forward, throwing open the door.

At the same moment the stranger ordered: "Jump in there!"

A push with the pistol accompanied the words, but it was unnecessary, for the escaping prisoner caught his late jailer by the throat, and with the strength of a madman hurled him against the stone wall at the further end of the cell.

Footsteps above, at this point, warned rescued and rescuer that foes were approaching, and picking up the lantern dropped by Whitey when forced into the cell, the stranger motioned his companion to follow him behind some bales and boxes scattered along one side of the wall.

"Who are you, and how did you manage to arrive so opportunely?" whispered Bull, for as the stranger had guessed, he had been the prisoner, though the delirium was feigned.

"Hush—not so loud! I am your friend—your comrade in avenging the death of the Lion! You are the Bloodhound, I am Tigress—"

Oaths and curses on the stupidity of whoever had knocked down the ladder interrupted the speaker, and after several calls for Whitey a rope was thrown down, and three men descended.

The new arrivals were Mike, Jake and Pike—the latter carrying a lantern swung from a string around his neck.

The two former had come to dig out their victim, and the latter to finish his.

Seeing nothing of his partner, Pike grew angry and suspicious, swearing that Whitey had managed to get the desired information and then disappeared to make use of it—throwing down the ladder to prevent him (Pike) from interfering with the prisoner.

"He must think I'm a kid, t' let twenty-five foot stop me! But, I'll show him he can't play me!"

"What'll ye do about it?" asked Mike, who knew the other pair had something on hand—as did Jake.

"Do? I'll finish the job as we agreed—and that will stop his game!"

"How?" inquired Jake.

That was a puzzler for Pike. He was eager to put an end to the prisoner's existence, but feared to undertake the murderous work alone—especially since finding that the latter was "looney."

"I don't know how t' tackle him."

"You've got him in the cage, haven't ye?" asked Jake.

"Yes."

"Well, if you'll give us a hand, and keep your trap closed, I'll show you something."

Stepping forward as he spoke, Jake looked into the "cage," and saw Whitey lying in a heap against the wall at the further side.

"It's all right," he said, and touching a knob alongside the door. "Give this a yank and you'll drop him into the sewer—but he looks half dead now."

"Shammin'!" fiercely declared Pike, and grasping the fatal knob gave it a tremendous pull.

"There! Now, I'm square—" he began as the apparently solid flagging opened,

and with a yell of terror the prisoner disappeared from view!

The ruffian never finished the sentence, for as the flagging opened, Whitey was coming to, and his yell called attention to who he was.

For a minute, the murderer was speechless. Then, he cried:

"Good Lord! Did ye see him? It wuz Whitey! Can we do anythin'?"

"No! And I guess the less you have t' say, the better for yerself!" sharply answered Jake.

"But the other feller must've got away?"

"That's got nothing t' do with it. Whitey's gone, too—through your acting against orders—so, you'd better keep mum!"

"The other fellow must have thrown down the ladder to keep you out," continued Jake.

"Sure! We might've guessed there wuz somethin' wrong when we saw that," declared Mike.

The trio then went to the tank, where another surprise was in store for two of them, in particular.

The work of digging out the mortar-covered body was a by no means easy task, but the sight of the decoy's face drove away every feeling except amazement—and fear.

"Great Caesar! How did this happen?" cried Pike.

"Two gone! I knew there was something wrong!" muttered Jake.

"Thy why'n thunder didn't you look into it?"

"But, how could he have escaped? It's impossible! The two must have come down!"

Then, recollecting the noise of a heavy body striking the side of the tank, Jake exclaimed:

"That's what it was! He caught hold of Flood, and both came down!"

"Come, Mike! Search the cellar—he's around somewhere—and would be there instead of Flood, if it wasn't for your rope idea!"

"Yes; an' if it wasn't for your tank idea, he'd be dead long ago!" angrily retorted Mike.

"The curse works like a charm!" muttered Bull's rescuer. "Two dead, and two more ready to fight!"

"Have ye an extra pistol?" asked Bull.

"Yes; quick—take it! Here they come!"

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE VAULT.

As the trio of ruffians turned toward the hiding-place of Bull and his rescuer, gleaming steel could be seen in the hands of each.

"There'll be some fur flying round here in a couple minutes," muttered the Bloodhound.

"Why not search all around the tank before tryin' anywhere else?" suggested Pike, and the idea was promptly adopted.

A half hour's search in the immediate vicinity of the tank having resulted in nothing, the searchers decided to wait until daylight, when, with lanterns all around, the search would be renewed.

"He must be here, and can't get away if we keep guard up-stairs!" declared Jake.

Mike made a sneering remark regarding his partner's shrewdness, but before the latter could reply, a cry from Pike brought them to his side.

"It must be the Fox!" hissed the stranger, and leveling his revolver, fired—smashing the lantern in Pike's hand.

The next instant another shot rung out, and the ruffian fell back with a howl of pain.

"Hold him up while I light a match," growled Mike.

"What? D'ye want t' make targets of us? Not much! I'm going up that ladder."

"What'll I do with him?"

"Whatever you like! This place is too small for all that's in it to-night, and if he can't get up the ladder that's his funeral!"

"I s'pose that's how you'd use me!" exclaimed Mike.

Jake made no reply, beginning to ascend the ladder without further delay.

When his partner was almost at the opening in the floor above, Mike (still supporting Pike) saw a dim, spectral figure gliding noiselessly across the gloomy cellar toward the ladder.

Although guessing what was going to happen, Mike uttered no warning—he was too angry, and the next moment Jake was pitched headlong to the floor.

"Ain't nothin' ghostly about the arm that jerked that ladder!" muttered Mike.

"Hello! Up she goes again," he continued, seeing the ladder immediately replaced.

As he spoke, a low, peculiar whistle came from the other side of the cellar, and was answered by some person very close to Mike.

"The bloody place is full of people!" the ruffian exclaimed.

While still standing undecided and alarmed, Mike saw a second figure—a very giant in the darkness—approaching, and dropping Pike, whipped out his revolver.

"Drop that gun!" thundered a voice almost beside him, and turning quickly he found himself facing a shining revolver in the hand of a man lying on the ground.

A moment later, a similar order from the man approaching discovered to Mike that the giant had him covered, also, and down went his "gun."

"Now, walk—into that cell!" directed Bull, and at the point of a pistol, and forced along by the collar, the ruffian entered the death-trap cell.

Having locked in the frightened ruffian, Bull sought and found the man who had answered his whistle—the Fox!

It was a joyful meeting, but there was no time for talking, and though sore, and lame, and weak, Fox promptly assented to the proposition to leave the cellar at once.

"Who is that?" he asked as they approached the ladder—the Bloodhound almost carrying him.

"We've had no time to talk, but I know that he is your friend and mine, and that but for him we both would probably be dead by this time," answered Bull.

They were, now, at the foot of the ladder, and with the assistance of his friends the Fox managed to climb to the top.

Day was dawning when the trio entered the room where the Fox was trapped, and both detectives looked curiously at their new and strangely found friend.

"What are your plans?" the stranger asked. "Don't you think that it will be as well to leave these tools as they are—to get out, or be brought out by their friends?"

"Why not bag those three in the cellar," put in Bull, "and such others as I may be able to pick out in this dive in front? We'd be pretty sure of a confession from some one—if not all of them."

Fox made no response. He was closely watching the stranger, who replied:

"Instead of arresting the tools, by quietly watching the employers you can take the whole gang."

Bull looked at his comrade to decide the question, and the latter quietly remarked:

"I think Miss Weston is right!"

Not for a moment did the disguised girl lose her self-possession, and both her companions showed their admiration as she smilingly said:

"We must get away from here—at once, and unnoticed. These creatures below will invent some story to cover their failure, and thus the real rascals will be thrown off their guard!"

The men listened in amazed admiration, and when the speaker ceased, the Fox nodded approvingly.

"You go ahead," he said to Bull. "Miss Weston will follow within a minute or two, and I'll bring up the rear."

The Bloodhound looked dubiously at the Fox's injured ankle, then examined his revolver, and with a nod to the others quitted the vault.

CHAPTER XV.

EXPLANATIONS THAT DIDN'T EXPLAIN.

Two hours after the departure of the three detectives from the vault, they were closeted in Bull's home, where Miss Weston was telling the story of her adventures since leaving Mrs. Morgan's.

"For certain reasons, purely personal, I felt it my duty to ascertain to my satisfaction if Ralph Raymond was innocent of our friend's death.

"The only way I could be satisfied as to Ralph's innocence or guilt was to talk to him—to ask him point-blank how he parted with Mr. McVeigh."

"That's a new way of working it—asking the criminal if he's guilty!" dryly commented the Bloodhound.

"It would not answer in other cases, perhaps," replied Weston, "but I know Ralph Raymond—and had I judged him innocent, would have warned him that you were suspecting him of the murder!"

"That makes no difference—it was wrong!" declared Fox, sternly. "Our work is too dangerous to be wasted for any sentimental whims!"

The Bloodhound had been staring very hard at Weston for the last couple minutes, and evidently not unobserved, for in response to the Fox's rebuke, the female detective turned to him and inquired:

"You are beginning to remember me, I see. Do you believe 'the Hawk' likely to spoil or waste any of your dangerous work?"

Paying no heed to the sarcastic reference to the dangerous work, Bull answered by jumping up and grasping Weston's hand, exclaimed:

"By the eternal! I never suspected who it was came so luckily to my rescue, until you began to fight Fox."

"Fox, Weston was our right-hand man in breaking up Red Ralph's gang!"

"And, now, for the balance of your story!" eagerly exclaimed Bull.

"Well, I decided that Ralph Raymond prompted the murder, and left for Mrs. Morgan's intending to await your return, Mr. Fox, and to tell you so—and something more."

"It was not to be, however. I had not gone three blocks when I found I had 'company,' and guessing who it was, and why, led him a lively and lengthy dance. Then, tiring of the sport, I 'lost' him, and, then, shadowed him back to Mr. Raymond's residence."

The female detective then went on, and related how, beginning to shadow Raymond the previous day, she had followed him to the dive, and after waiting some time outside, had luckily entered the alley in time to overhear the conversation between the "banker" and his partner.

What followed the reader already knows. The information that "Mr. Jones" of Raymond & Co. was Mason, the notorious bank burglar, was a surprise to the Fox, but not to the Bloodhound.

"Oh, yes; I knew it!" declared the latter, "and that was one reason why I mentioned it to poor Mac, and why we both were doubtful of the protests of reformation—though Mason disappeared, and at about the same time Raymond to prove the truth of his protests offered to make good as far as possible certain property of which he had assisted to defraud a Miss Louise Watson—

or, as we know the lady—Weston, whose uncle he is, or claims to be."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Fox, and looking significantly at Weston, asked:

"Does that explain your reluctance to tell all concerning Ralph of the Red Hand?"

"Partly," was the laconic answer.

"And you intend to remain silent?"

"For the present—yes. But I have no reluctance about saying that the name I have adopted—the Tigress—exactly expresses my feeling toward Red Ralph!"

"You may, therefore, rest assured that nothing is being kept back to help him—the treacherous murderer of his own—"

The speaker stopped short. In her fury she almost revealed the secret.

"What is the programme?" she quietly asked.

"That, we must now decide upon," thoughtfully answered the Fox.

"I will look after the connection between Raymond and Mason, and ascertain the reason for this pretended banking business, if you will leave it to me," offered Weston.

"Mac had discovered something suspicious about that business," remarked Bull.

"And that was the reason of his removal," positively asserted Fox, adding:

"We must lay our plans carefully before making another move."

CHAPTER XVI.

THIEVES FALLING OUT.

ABOUT the time appointed for the production of the proof—the body of "McVeigh"—there were three men anxiously discussing how to account for their inability to do so.

Mike and Jake were troubled about Fox, but not so much worried as Pike was over Bull's disappearance, for he had received half the promised reward.

The three ruffians suspected that the employer was the same in each case, and Jake consolingly remarked:

"Ten to one you'll not get a copper! We were smart enough to get all our 'stuff' last night, and I've half a mind to skip out; for Mason's a holy terror."

"But s'pose he wants the 'proof,' or the money back—what'll ye do?" asked Mike.

"Yes, what'll ye say become o' the body they saw?" added Pike—thinking a similar excuse might serve him.

"Say? Why somethin' like what did happen in that cell; that the body was put in there after we dug it out, and that it fell through by accident—same as that partner o' yours did."

"By gum! That's a good plant!" exclaimed Mike.

"You bet yer life, it's a good one!" agreed Pike. "We kin let on the two o' them wuz in there at the same time, eh?"

"Yes, the more of us swear to it, the better," assented Jake.

So it was arranged—and thus the treachery prayed for by the murdered detective grew apace.

Shortly afterward the employer and the go-between arrived, the working of the trap in the cell was explored, and the lie sworn to so strongly that it was believed.

"Though you'd have got a good five hundred more for a sight of his face!" declared Raymond, as he paid the price agreed for digging out the man in the tank.

"It leaves me just as uneasy and uncertain as ever," he continued, addressing Mason.

"Oh, hang it! Don't be so childish!"

"You never met a man who dared say that of me, much less to me!" angrily retorted Raymond.

Mason muttered something about ingratitude, but his confederate retorted that the death of Bull and McVeigh was necessary to insure the success of the scheme to rob the bank, so that one was as interested as the other.

"But it wouldn't have been necessary, if you'd been left out," grumbled Mason.

They were passing out of the alley into the street as this was going on when Pike overtook them and asked:

"Say, boss! Don't I get my stuff?"

"What for? What have I to pay you for?" demanded Raymond angrily.

"For the other bloke—Bull."

"Go to the man who hired ye! I know nothing about it!"

The banker spoke savagely. He had no desire to deal direct with his tools, and felt secure enough in his disguise to defy this particular ruffian.

But Raymond was mistaken about the security of his disguise. His very anger betrayed his identity to Pike who, as the others moved off, vengefully muttered:

"All right, Mr. Banker Raymond! You just wait till I get onto yer game, 'n' you'll find out that ye can't monkey wud me!"

The "bankers," meantime, were proceeding in the direction of Broadway. Neither spoke—each feeling angry with the other—until the Bowery was reached.

"Well, good-night," said Raymond stopping at this thoroughfare.

"Good-night?" sarcastically echoed his confederate. "What d'ye mean?"

"What do you mean?" sternly counter-questioned Raymond.

"Just this. You're having all the fun out o' this thing, and the gang's beginning to kick about it. You'll have to take your turn at the work like the rest of us."

"Indeed? Who says all this? Who is in command of the job? Who planned it? Who organized the gang and furnished the funds?"

As Raymond hurled this storm of angry interrogations at his confederate, a man who had followed them from the entrance to the alley passed within earshot and laughed as he noted the tone of the speaker.

Raymond caught the sound of the laugh, and started as if struck a sudden blow.

"Good Lord! Mason, did you hear that?" he cried looking at the stranger. "It's McVeigh's laugh! Those hounds of yours have been lying!"

"Oh, you've got McVeigh on the brain!"

"Be careful, Mason! Be careful of what you say. And be careful, too, that near as you are to success the job isn't spoiled!"

Before the burglar could reply, the speaker jumped on a passing car, leaving the former staring after him in anger and doubt as to the meaning of the threat regarding the bank robbery.

"By all the fiends you had better be careful!" muttered Mason as he turned downtown. "Were you twenty Red Ralphs you shall be looked after—and sharply, too!"

Thus musing, Mason pursued his course toward Wall street, to observe whether the tunneling being done by the gang was liable to attract attention.

This tunneling was laborious work, and was shared in by all the gang except Raymond, but there had been no objection to the latter's freedom from toil, because his was the brain that had planned everything, and his the money that paid the large expenses.

Mason, however, having made the statement, intended to stir up a protest from the gang on the strength of Raymond's suspicious talk.

Had the burglar been less absorbed in planning this malicious move against his leader, he might have noticed that he was being shadowed, but, as it was, he entered Raymond's office utterly unsuspecting of that dangerous fact.

Before entering his own office, Mason stopped and looked into the bank, causing a suspicion of the truth to flash across the keen-witted shadow—Weston.

"They're working something with regard to the bank," muttered the female detective.

"I must put the Fox and the Bloodhound

on the trail of the others employed in this queer banking concern. Once we've 'located' them, it will be easy to guess the nature of their game— Ah! Who is this?"

The cause of this question was the appearance of a man—one of the gang—leaving Raymond & Co.'s basement office.

As he was to be gone but a few minutes, the man did not deem it necessary to fasten the door other than by the ordinary spring latch, and after a moment's hesitation, Weston crossed the street, and with hardly any difficulty entered Raymond & Co.'s offices, muttering:

"I can find the man at any time, but this opportunity might be lost forever."

Moving cautiously toward the rear of the office, and listening intently, the daring detective soon heard faint noises coming from below.

At the extreme end of the office there was a door. On opening this door the noises became louder, and still louder as the detective descended the stairs upon which the door opened.

As the Tigress began the descent of the stairs, Mr. Raymond, the banker, came hurrying down to his offices.

The banker made no attempt to escape notice, and to the watchman of— National Bank, who came to the door as he passed, addressed a pleasant "Good-morning."

Mr. Raymond entered his upper office, but immediately descended to the basement, and then fully as cautiously as Weston began to descend to the cellar.

CHAPTER XVII.

RED RALPH ON HIS GUARD.

WHEN Weston reached the foot of the cellar stairs, the noise of the tunneling came, as expected, from the wall next the— National Bank, and glancing in that direction the detective discovered three men at work with pick and shovel and crowbar.

The men were conversing as they worked, but they were too far away to catch what was said, so Weston cautiously crept toward them.

Mason was beginning to talk so as to stir up feeling against Raymond, and just as the detective got within ear-shot suggested:

"Suppose we quit for a few minutes, boys? The work has gone pretty near far enough for to-night—and, anyhow, I'm tired of doing another man's share of it!"

"Why Frank's not gone more than five minutes," remonstrated one of the others, as adopting the suggestion they came out into the cellar.

"Oh, I don't mean McCoy's share," explained Mason, "I mean the share of the man who hasn't dirtied his hands so far."

As this was uttered, Weston became aware of the fact that there was another unseen listener, and that the latter was creeping nearer.

The new-comer was Red Ralph—coming just in time to catch Mason.

Not being aware of what had passed between Raymond and his "partner," Weston had no suspicion as to who was the second spy, and so drew back out of the path of the latter.

As there was but one of the seven forming the gang who had joined in the laborious work, Mason's reference to Raymond was, of course, thoroughly understood.

"Well, I s'pose the 'boss' thinks he's done his share in layin' out the job 'n' furnishin' the 'stuff' for it," remarked one of the trio.

"Do you think so?"

Mason spoke sharply. He did not like the indifferent tone of the remark.

"Oh, I don't know," was the still more careless response. "I reckon none of us 'd be so close t' a million if 'twarn't fur him."

The speaker was one of Red Ralph's old gang and stood by his captain.

"Do you think the same as Matt?" asked Mason, turning to the third man.

"Not much! I ain't achin' t' do more'n my share," was the prompt reply.

Footsteps on the stairs—audible despite all efforts to render them noiseless—interrupted the conversation at this point.

"It's McCoy—Big Frank—coming back!" though Weston retreating still further.

A couple seconds later the man who had gone out re-entered the cellar.

"Hello! Gone on strike?" asked McCoy, on seeing the others idle.

"Somethin' like it," responded Matt, "Mason's kickin' because the boss ain't puttin' in a few licks on the job."

"Oh, he's all right!" cheerfully exclaimed Big Frank. "Somebody's got t' do the gentleman, and I'm satisfied it should be him."

"But suppose he should take a notion to drop the job—get scared, and rather than let us go on without him, give the business to the police?" asked Mason.

"Oh, come off!" contemptuously exclaimed Matt.

"Ain't his style!" declared the giant burglar. "I'd throttle him before he could speak if I thought it!"

"Ah! I'm glad to hear you're fools altogether!" exclaimed Mason.

He then went on to describe the scene at the parting between himself and Raymond, dwelling on the latter's fear of McVeigh, and on his threatening words, and ended with:

"That is my principal reason for demanding that he should share in the work, for as yet he could claim that he was unaware of what is going on, never having been in the cellar as we would all have to admit."

Weston could hear the other spy gritting his teeth, and it flashed upon him that Raymond had been doubtful of Mason's friendship and dogged him.

Mason had barely ceased speaking when Red Ralph was upon him.

With one tiger-like spring, the ex-highwayman had cleared the intervening distance, and, before the amazed burglars could interfere, had caught his "partner" by the throat, yelling:

"Now, you treacherous, lying hound! why shouldn't I get rid of you?"

A gleaming bowie flashed in the dim light of the single lantern near which Mason was now lying prostrate, pinned to the earth by the vise-like grip of Raymond.

Big Frank was the first to recover himself, and jumped forward in time to stay the blow.

"Hold on!" cried the big burglar. "Give him a show to speak!"

"Yes, give him a show!" seconded another, springing to McCoy's assistance.

"You go easy there!" growled Matt, whipping out a revolver, jumping to where the others were struggling with Raymond.

Matt was going to the assistance of his old captain!

For a few moments it looked as if there would be a free fight.

"You'll soon begin to believe in the curse!" chuckled Weston, watching the struggling group, but it ceased at that point.

Seeing that Mason was recovering, McCoy released his grasp on Raymond, saying:

"Keep quiet for a while! We all have a say in this, and though you're boss, you must stand by the agreement."

"You, McCoy, speak of our agreement," said Raymond. "In accordance with that, I, as captain, place this man in your charge until all can be present to try him. Keep him here, and keep him carefully!"

"Why, what's he done?" asked the astonished "guard."

"Inciting trouble is next to treachery, the worst offense," was the significant response. "Matt will help you to take care of him."

"Come, now! What sort of a bluff are you tryin' to work?" demanded Mason, beginning to realize that he had got himself in to a scrape.

"You'll soon know, my friend," quietly replied Raymond, and to Matt:

"If anything goes crooked, let me know. Fire a shot if necessary to do so. "One of your strictest duties is to obey—without talk!"

This sharply spoken rebuke did not tend to relieve the giant's ill-humor, but paying no more heed to him, Raymond took Mason's supporter in hand.

"You, Dobbs, notify Moore and Howard to come an hour earlier to-night."

"Another thing before you go. You are here to obey orders—not to criticise!"

"Don't forget that! Now go!"

Dobbs obeyed, but like McCoy, looked very sullen over it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN EVENTFUL NIGHT.

AN hour after the departure of Dobbs, Weston, Fox and Bull met by appointment to report progress.

The Tigress's report excited the admiration of the others, and commenting on it, the Fox said:

"It's evident Mason was mistaken. Raymond's words referred only to the danger to be apprehended from Mac."

"And, by the way, who the deuce could he have mistaken for poor Mac?" asked Bull.

"Yes, it's queer he should make such a mistake, knowing McVeigh as well as he did," declared Fox.

"Is the job near completion, and shall we arrange to bag the lot to-night?"

"The job is probably nearly completed," replied Weston, "but they are no doubt waiting for some heavy Saturday."

"Yes; that's the usual rule," assented both Fox and Bull.

"Then we risk very little by simply overhearing them to-night, and I will look for that," spoke the female detective. "I shall go home and rest until evening, and will meet you before going down-town."

"She's a wonder—but I'm not going to trust her—a weak woman—alone among a gang of ruffians," declared Fox.

"As far as the 'weak woman' goes, you need not worry about her," replied the Bloodhound. "Why, when we knew her as the Hawk, I got a bullet in my leg one night, and she carried me a full quarter of a mile!"

"What the deuce was Mac doing?"

"By Jove! Say, do you know it never struck me before that it was always she and I that hunted together!"

"That's curious!"

"Yes. Funny, too, that 'twas him she fell in love with, eh?"

"Why, yes; but were you, also, a suitor?"

"I never said so."

"Ah! I understand."

"May be you do—but it's more than I can say!" rather roughly exclaimed Bull.

The subject was evidently an unpleasant one, so Fox dropped it, saying he was going down-town to keep an eye on Raymond.

"Hanged if I know what to do with myself! There don't seem to be anything left for me to do," exclaimed the Bloodhound.

"Your friend, the Hawk—or rather the Tigress, has left very little for either of us," returned Fox. "Why not see how the Curse is working among the lower ruffians? You know we must hang Pike, if he is the tool, and if not, ascertain who is the actual assassin."

"That's true, and I'm glad there is something worth while yet to be done."

A few minutes later the friends parted, the Fox returning in the evening to meet Weston.

Raymond had acted as usual during the day so Fox informed the Tigress, and the latter

set off, after informing him that in the event of anything happening to her, he would find a letter at Mrs. Morgan's for both Bull and himself.

"That's funny, too!" muttered Fox, as he proceeded in a leisurely manner to shadow his comrade.

He had only that morning heard of McVeigh's habit of leaving a letter whenever bent on a secret mission which he deemed particularly dangerous.

"And I suppose she knew of this habit," he mused, "and feeling that this is unusually hazardous, takes the same method of revealing what she knows of this Red Ralph."

Thus musing, and careless whether he kept his "man" in sight or lost him—since he knew where the latter was bound for, the Fox had missed the Tigress long before reaching the vicinity of Wall street.

It was about eight o'clock when the Fox reached Wall street, and passed Raymond & Co.'s offices.

He was not particularly anxious to run across Weston, but was somewhat surprised at not seeing the latter.

"It was his plan to wait until the last of the gang passed in and then follow him, but it may be that seeing a good opportunity, he has taken advantage of it."

Having arrived at this conclusion, Fox took up his position nearly opposite the bank where, after an hour's patient watching, he saw three men enter Raymond & Co.'s office.

Two or three men came together, and entered within a minute of each other.

The third man followed a short distance behind the others, and might have been suspected of shadowing them, but that he appeared to have no difficulty in opening the door, and entered so confidently.

"Three—that makes six at all events, and the whole gang, if Raymond remained in the office instead of going home."

Just as the Fox finished uttering this, two men more entered the bogus banking establishment—much to Fox's astonishment.

"Hang it all! Unless Raymond's orders were altered that makes eight," he muttered.

Again the last man might be suspected of shadowing, and this caused the watcher to believe it was Weston.

"So it's high time for me to join the family discussion which soon will be started," he soliloquized, and making sure that his revolvers were handy, proceeded to play burglar on the burglars by picking the lock of the basement door.

"Very odd about those five men," muttered the Fox as he cautiously walked toward the door described by the Tigress.

And something still more strange occurred just as he reached the rear door.

Fox's hand was on the knob when a sharp click, indicating the throwing back of the bolt of the front lock, attracted his attention.

A moment later the amazed detective was crouching behind a chair standing near the rear door, and watching a man who had just entered.

"Six to-night, and two or three below—" began the watcher, and then stopped short, for the new-comer after reaching the center of the office produced a dark-lantern, by the light of which he commenced looking right and left at the walls, as he slowly advanced toward the detective's hiding-place.

"This fellow's a stranger, and looking for a door," was the Fox's reading of the signs, and he was still wondering who the stranger could be, when a sudden flash of the bull's-eye revealed him to the latter.

There was one yell of terror following the discovery of Fox's presence, and then came a crash as the stranger fell fainting to the floor.

"Pike!"

One glance had revealed the identity of the last visitor, and then the detective sought refuge behind the nearest desk.

He had not long to wait.

In less than a minute after Pike's fall, the door was cautiously opened, and though Fox could see nothing, he knew somebody was peeping into the office—reconnoitering.

"Now for it!" muttered Fox as he heard a low whistle, and almost as he spoke a half-dozen men poured into the office from the cellar.

Among the gang was Mason. He had been tried and acquitted of any intentional inciting of trouble, but that only served to widen the breach between him and Raymond and on seeing Pike he exclaimed:

"Ha! Here's some of your work! Your tools are dogging you—the job must be done to-night!"

"Better make sure there isn't more of 'em about," suggested one of the others.

"Right! Search the place!" ordered Red Ralph.

Discovery was inevitable, and fully realizing the danger of the situation the detective suddenly arose and, revolver in hand, faced the gang.

Like Pike, Raymond seemed terrified, and shrunk back with an inarticulate cry; but the shining revolvers were sufficient for the others, who saw only a stranger whose presence threatened the success of their job, and in a moment they rushed at the detective.

The Fox's revolvers spoke twice and two men went down, but the others came on, and before he could fire again they were upon him.

A blow from a short club on the head, and another from the butt of a pistol, combined to send the detective to the floor, but even as he fell help arrived—and such help as amazed even him.

From the front door rushed the Bloodhound, and through the rear door burst McVeigh!

CHAPTER XIX.

MYSTERY.

THE appearance of the second McVeigh proved too much for the nerves of the gang.

It was too much for the rascals, and headed by Raymond they dashed by Bull through the office to the street.

Of the gang, Mason was the hardest-headed, and, though he joined in the rush, he made a desperate thrust at McVeigh.

"That's for your interference!" he hissed, and leaving the knife in the wound fled, after his confederates.

The "big job" was ruined, but the burglar had partly revenged himself, he felt sure, for Mac had fallen like a log.

Had the burglars known that there were only three of the detectives, (and two of them wounded,) they might have attempted to finish their so nearly completed work, but the Fox's two shots had so alarmed them that they fled when Bull and Mac appeared, thinking it was a descent by the regular force.

The two burglars hit by Fox were lying close to the latter—one dead and the other dying, while Fox, himself, was barely able to stagger to his feet and as Bull turned up the gas, hoarsely exclaimed:

"It's Mac, Bull! He fell—over there!"

For a moment the Bloodhound stared as if he thought the speaker was raving; then looked in the direction indicated, and, then, with a cry of astonishment and alarm, jumped to the side of the unconscious detective.

"By the Great Eternal!" he cried, "you are right—'tis Mac!"

At that moment, the Fox caught sight of a figure creeping behind the desks along the wall, and ordered:

"Come here! Quick, or I'll fire!"

In response to this fiercely uttered threat, the ruffian, Pike, arose and shaking like an aspen advanced toward Fox.

The whole affair had occupied such a short time, that the rough had only just recovered from the fainting-fit following his seeing Fox—as McVeigh.

Attracted by the order, Bull turned from Mac, asking:

"What's wrong?"

"Good Lord! Are you all ghosts?" cried the terror-stricken wretch as he looked and saw the real McVeigh being supported by his double, another supposed to be—dead man.

He was ready to sink with terror, but there was nothing ghostly, or unreal, about the grim assurance.

"You'll find me a lively ghost, and yourself a real one, if you attempt to stir from that spot!"

Pike did not move.

"Now sit down—right where you stand!" ordered Fox, and having helped to see the order obeyed Bull returned to Mac.

The latter was just recovering consciousness—the Bloodhound's pocket flask assisting materially in the reviving process.

"Now, old fellow, we must see about stopping the blood," said Bull.

"No, no!" exclaimed Mac in a hurried, alarmed tone. "Never mind! Get me home! You will, Bill, won't you? And let no one but the doctor and Mrs. Morgan touch the wound?" added Mac in a curiously pleading, womanish way.

"Certainly, Mac!" assured the wondering Bull.

A tremendous thunder-storm, which had been raging for the previous half-hour, had ceased a few minutes before this, and a policeman just resuming patrol, finding Raymond & Co.'s door open, now entered.

An ambulance was brought very quietly to the door, and the wounded removed to the hospital, Bull accompanying them, while the officer took charge of Pike.

The latter was the only prisoner. Death had forestalled justice with the second burglar.

At the hospital, despite the entreaties of his friends, Mac refused to be treated, insisting on being removed to Mrs. Morgan's before receiving medical attendance.

Bull quickly procured a carriage, and the three detectives were deposited at Mrs. Morgan's about daylight.

"You, too, are hurt," he murmured to the Fox; "go for Doctor Draper."

Early as it was, the eminent physician answered the summons promptly, and on arriving, and having had a word in private with Mrs. Morgan, quietly invited the two detectives to leave the sick chamber for a half-hour.

Mac had not been taken to his former room, and on leaving him Fox and Bull sought that apartment.

Both detectives were a little puzzled by Mac's conduct regarding his wound, and his failure to inform them of his recovery.

"I suppose the blow must have affected his brain," remarked the Fox. "But what puzzles me is the fact of his being alive at all."

"It is wonderful," assented Bull, and noticing a letter on the mantel, addressed to himself and Fox, asked:

"What's this?"

"What? Oh, yes, I had forgotten. That's a letter from our friend, the Tigress, to be opened in case anything happened her last night—"

"And, by Jove! Where was she?"

Like Bull, the Fox seemed struck by the handwriting on the large envelope addressed to both, and looked inquiringly at his comrade.

"You see it?"

"Yes, it's the same as Mac's," Fox replied in a perplexed way.

"Exactly! There's something strange about this business, Fox: Mac dies—Weston

turns up! Mac comes to life—Weston disappears!"

Bull paused for a moment, and then reaching for the letter, said:

"I've a mind to open that, Fox?"

"Better wait until we can talk to Mac about it," answered Fox, adding:

"And this Red Ralph and his gang?"

"That's true! I didn't give that officer many points, and the whole gang will be out of reach if something isn't done at once. We must not let that scoundrel, Ralph, escape!"

"The doctor will be through pretty soon—shall we wait and learn if Mac can be consulted?"

Before Bull could reply Dr. Draper looking very grave, entered the room:

"Your friend has been seriously injured, and must not be disturbed," the doctor explained.

"Then, we had better go for that gang at once!" exclaimed Bull.

"I am going to read that letter, first," quietly declared Fox. "It may—probably will—shed some light on the subject."

"Right, you are! Go ahead!" agreed Bull.

"Hold on!" interposed the doctor. "Your friend knows of that letter, and directs that, before opening it, you ascertain the whereabouts of a Mr. Raymond."

Bull looked inquiringly at his comrade, feeling both surprised and annoyed at this interference, but Fox promptly agreed, saying:

"All right, sir! Let's get away, Bill!"

We will precede the detectives to Raymond's residence—for which they immediately started.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FINAL WORKING OF THE CURSE.

AFTER leaving their offices Red Ralph and his gang of frightened, disappointed cracksmen divided—Mason and Matt hurrying uptown while the others started to leave the city at once.

On reaching home Raymond immediately began preparing for the flight which he knew must be made without delay.

The bogus banker was in an ugly mood, and full of rage against his "partner," (whom he blamed to a great extent for the failure of their plot against the bank,) returned only the shortest and surliest answers to Mason's few remarks on the way uptown.

"Where shall we head for?" asked Mason as Raymond began filling a valise.

"We?" echoed the other, "I don't know where we shall head for."

"What d'ye mean? D'ye think you can throw us away—cast us off like a worn-out hat?"

Mason spoke angrily. He had hardly any money, having like the others depended almost altogether on the boss for funds, but was even worse off than any of the others.

"Why, d'ye expect me to pension you?" sneered Raymond. "If you hadn't tried to make trouble, we might all have had as much as we could carry."

"That's got nothing to do with it—though it was you and your blasted nightmare of a detective that ruined the job!" hotly retorted Mason.

Manuel, who was assisting in the packing, and Matt who stood looking on, glanced apprehensively at Raymond.

"You can go hang yourself, for all I care! You get nothing from me," replied Raymond surlily.

"Look out for yourself, Mr. Red Ralph! Don't go too far, or you'll regret it!" threatened Mason.

"Oh! You'd stop me, wouldn't you—if you could?" mocked Raymond.

"What's to prevent me?"

"This!" yelled Red Ralph, leaping at his confederate.

He had been gathering himself for the spring, and came on Mason like a tiger, and, gripping his victim by the throat, he dealt a deadly blow with a knife.

"There! Stop me, now, if you can!" he fiercely exclaimed as Mason fell on the floor.

With the the attack on Mason, Manuel and Matt retreated to opposite corners of the room, knowing that it would be dangerous to be within reach of the desperado.

As Mason fell Matt whipped out a revolver, and as he cocked it the clicking attracted Raymond's attention.

"Ha! More treacherous hounds!" he exclaimed, glaring ferociously at Matt.

"Come now, Cap! Be a little easy, won't you? There ain't no treachery 'bout me 'r Manuel," coaxed Matt.

Notwithstanding the apparently disinterestedness of this, the ruffian's reference to the Mexican was to call attention to the fact that the latter, also, was prepared for an attack.

Ralph laughed—an unpleasant, ugly laugh at this exhibition of mistrust and fear.

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser," he quoted. "What have you been doing, or thinking of doing—both of ye?"

"Well, ye know, Cap, they didn't call ye Red Hand for nothin'. When yer blood's up a friend's as like t' git it as a foe," explained Matt.

"Oh, you remember that, eh? Well, let it go. Take that and bury it in the cellar—and that, too!"

As he spoke, Raymond threw the blood-stained dagger beside the corpse, and after a moment's hesitation Matt nodded to Manuel who responded by coming forward, and between them Mason's body was removed from the room.

"Curse ye, I'll pay ye for that!" muttered Ralph as the others passed out.

Short as it had been, though his face was turned away, he had noted the hesitation about obeying his order as well as the nod and response between his confederates.

"They're afraid I will leave while they're below, but they need not," he continued. "I'll wait for them, and have a parting glass with the cursed, suspicious hounds!"

Laughing fiendishly as he spoke, Ralph took a small vial from his pocket and having dropped a tiny portion of the contents into two glasses proceeded to fill them with brandy.

"There, my suspicious friends, is your reward for your labor—the last labor you'll be bothered with," he muttered, surveying the glasses with a smile of devilish satisfaction.

Then opening a small hand-bag the murderer began counting the gold and greenbacks with which it was stuffed.

"Pretty close to ten thousand still left. Well, I reckon I can make a fight on that much."

"But what's keeping those hounds below so long? I must be off! And I must see them off—for another world—before I leave!"

Until the thought of the precious time he was losing occurred to him, Ralph had been quietly musing, but as the past and present came to his mind, he jumped to his feet almost shouting his thoughts.

As the ruffian sprung up, Manuel hurried from the peep-hole in the door of the little room adjoining the library.

Until that night the most confidential as well as faithful of Red Ralph's band, the Mexican now was full of vengeance.

"And he would sacrifice even me!" he muttered as he hurried to the cellar. "Well, he shall pay for it—and dearly, too!"

Accordingly on reaching Matt, who was covering the grave of the murdered burglar

with some loose planks, the Mexican described what he had seen and heard in the library.

Matt, like the Mexican, became enraged at Red Ralph's treachery.

"An' that's what we get for stickin' to him through thick 'n' thin?" he bitterly exclaimed.

"Well, he'll find that ther'll be two in the game—the dirty cur! You 'n' me'll have t' look out for ourselves, eh, Manuel?"

The Mexican nodded.

"Good enough! Keep yer eye peeled for any more treachery 'n' I'll look out that he don't dump us! That chap, Mason, was nearer right than we thought, 'n' I'm sorry—"

An angry summons from above interrupted the speaker, and with a significant look at Manuel he led the way up-stairs.

"What have you been doing?" Ralph demanded as they entered the library.

"You could have planted a regiment since you went below," he added in a less surly tone, and pointing to the poisoned liquor mutely invited his confederates to drink.

"None for me," replied Matt.

"Nor me," Manuel signified by a shake of the head.

"What d'ye mean?" sharply demanded Ralph, looking suspiciously from one to the other.

"I'm gittin' too old t' begin havin' my liquor poured out for me," dryly answered Matt.

Manuel made no reply. He intended to let the others do the fighting, but Ralph spoiled that by asking:

"And you, friend Manuel—are you, also, too old to accept a drink from my hand?"

This smoothly spoken question—belied by the threatening expression of the speaker's eyes, and the knowledge possessed by Manuel of the contents of the glasses—transformed the crafty Mexican into a reckless ruffian.

"Yes!" he fairly yelled, whipping out a heavy bowie-knife. "Yes, I'm too old to drink poison because you offer it!"

Shooting was liable—likely—to attract attention, but the leader's hand flew to his hip.

"Stop—right there!" ordered Matt.

The latter had foreseen what would follow the moment Manuel began to speak, and now held his former leader fairly covered.

For a few moments Ralph stood grinding his teeth and glaring at Matt. He thoroughly understood his danger; that the man before him had thrown off the yoke, and would shoot—and shoot to kill.

"Get that gun, Manuel!" directed Matt, seeing how Ralph was chafing at being restrained from using the weapon.

Still holding his bowie in his right hand the Mexican advanced with his left extended to disarm Ralph, and then rage got the better of the latter. With a lightning-like movement, Ralph caught Manuel's extended hand and pulled him between Matt and himself. Simultaneously a shot rung out and the Mexican fell forward with a groan, but even as he did, struck a deadly blow at Ralph, with his knife, quickly followed by Matt flying from the room.

Thus was the prayer granted—the dying detective's Curse fulfilled.

Disappointment, treachery, and destruction had been the lot of Ralph of the Red Hand from the day of the Curse.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ENDING.

BUT little remains to be told.

The Bloodhound and the Fox arrived at the residence of Raymond, the bogus banker, shortly after the end of the Kilkenny-cat-like tragedy which finished the career of Red Ralph and his gang.

The police were already on the scene, and the coroner had been notified. The two

innocent colored servants knew nothing of their employer's affairs, and had not heard any disturbance the previous night.

"So it looks as if we'd another mystery on our hands," observed the ward detective who had been sent to investigate the affair.

"Yes—though it's pretty evident they've been having a free-for-all fight," replied Bull.

As Raymond and most of his confederates were dead, Bull thought it wisest to say nothing more until McVeigh could be consulted and Fox's silence showed that he agreed with this idea.

But nothing was to be said or done until the arrival of the coroner, and curious to hear the result of his investigations, the detectives decided to await the inquest.

"The news of the affair down-town will have spread by that time," whispered Fox. "We will see what effect it has on this."

Bull nodded and the other continued:

Take your official friend outside. I want some of the liquor in those glasses."

The Bloodhound quickly understood the object, and having a slight acquaintance with the ward detective, had no difficulty in persuading the latter to accompany him to a saloon two blocks away.

"My friend will remain in the library, and the officer at the door can look after anything else," Bull explained.

As the latter was quite somebody in official eyes, and as the ward man was quite seedy that particular morning, the invitation was eagerly accepted.

While the official detectives were absent, Fox secured a portion of the contents of each of the glasses, and then throwing open the blinds and drawing back the curtains, got down on his knees and producing a microscope, began to examine the rather light-colored carpet.

Luck favored the Fox; for, beginning his examination where the bodies were lying, he discovered the blood were Mason had fallen and the trail from it to and through the ante-room to the cellar.

The fresh earth on the shovel used in digging was sufficient to show the keen-witted detective what had been done with the body, and in less than a minute after he had discovered the identity of the victim through finding an emblem "presented to George Mason."

"Knocked off when dragging him to the grave," muttered the Fox, who, by the light of his bull's-eye, could plainly see where the murdered burglar had been laid down by two men, and then dragged to the grave by one.

"They did not trust Raymond, and one went back to watch him while the other did the digging," concluded the detective—reading the signs as correctly as if he had been present.

"There isn't a doubt of it," he mused, following the earthy trail back to the door opening into the library, "and there, by Jove! is where the spy stood, and the hole he looked through."

Stepping to the here well-defined tracks of the Mexican, Fox found himself facing the peep-hole, which commanded a view of the table and glasses.

"That's enough! This liquor is doctored!" he decided. "This fellow caught him at it and told the grave-digger. Then came the fight."

As the detective uttered these words—for he was thinking aloud—he heard the voice of Bull talking in a purposely elevated tone to warn him (Fox) of the return of himself and the ward detective.

In another minute the official detective entered, and found Fox resting in an easy-chair apparently about half asleep.

"I guess I'm too sleepy to wait, Bill," he said, yawning, and asked:

"Are you going to stay?"

The significant glance accompanying the question decided it.

"No, I don't see any use in waiting—not now, at all events," replied Bull.

"You've found something?" he continued as they passed out into the street.

"Yes—something. Mason is buried in the cellar. That liquor was meant for those sent to bury him, and was, I believe, poisoned by Raymond. The others caught him at it and then came the fight in which two were killed."

"Where are you heading for?"

"A chemist's—to have what I got analyzed."

"Why? We have no further interest in the case—now that Raymond's dead."

"Very true; but Mac may like to, and it would be a satisfaction to me to know I'm right."

"Of course! Let's find a chemist, and then you go tell Mac—if it's safe—while I go down-town. That officer's story of the Wall street affair must be confirmed."

A chemist was quickly found, and after a hasty examination of the contents of the bottle brought by Fox, pronounced the liquor poisoned.

"Prussic acid!" he declared, and then the detectives separated as arranged.

At the Old Slip station-house Bull as an official of the Central Office received full credit for the story that the discovery of the burglars by himself and a friend was purely accidental!

The flicer on post was saved by the assertion that the burglars had been discovered only a few minutes before he arrived on the scene, and that they fled on his appearance!

Bull's reason for the first story was his knowledge of Mac's aversion to in any way injuring Red Ralph while there was a possibility of avoiding it. The man was dead. Why injure his memory?

It was generous of Bull, for the truth could have gained him great credit. But the truth, too, he felt would have hurt, if not displeased his friend—and that was enough for the Bloodhound.

The sheltering, or rather glorifying, of the derelict policeman was, also, generous, and the latter could scarcely express his gratitude when they met outside the "House."

But, Bull wanted no thanks; "he didn't think he had done much anyhow;" and, tearing himself away from the grateful officer, he hurried off to ascertain how Mac was progressing.

He had no idea of what was in store for him—not the slightest. For that reason the surprise he received was the greatest of his life.

"Ah! Got through, eh?"

"Yes. How is Mac?"

"Fairly—that is; the doctor can't speak either way just yet."

"What! as bad as that?"

"Yes; but sit, Bull; I've got some strange news for you," and Fox pushed his excited comrade into a chair.

"I've opened that letter since leaving you," continued Fox, "and in it found another addressed to you personally."

"Where is it?" impatiently demanded Bull.

"Come, come, Bull! You must not get excited," was the smiling response.

"I have the letter, but cannot deliver it until ordered by Doctor Draper."

"When I returned and informed M—Mac of what we had learned, he bade me open the letter and read what was addressed to both, but to await Doctor Draper's orders regarding the one meant for you—not to deliver it until ordered."

Bull, now, grew wonderfully quiet.

"What is in our letter?" he asked.

"Well, my boy, you must prepare for a grand surprise. Miss Weston and the Mac of last night are one and the same!"

"Mac's mother's name was McWeston. He adopted the name and character of an old detective, who took him in hand when he came to New York years ago, at the age of sixteen."

"Louise, now up-stairs, was then but eleven, and when Mac left her she had been adopted by a wealthy old lady who died a year afterward."

"Now, comes in our friend Ralph."

"Ralph's real name is Weston! He is the uncle of the girl up-stairs, and, of course, of our poor Mac."

"Ralph Weston heard of the death of Louise's benefactress, and that the latter, being without relations, had left her immense property to her adopted daughter, so he came forward, had himself appointed guardian of his niece, and took charge of the estate."

"Except Louise, no one knew where the boy—the brother—our Mac, had gone, and soon it became an undoubted thing that he was dead."

"Ralph evidently believed that he was next of kin to the heiress, for he induced a small circus proprietor to train the little niece for trapeze performances—pretending the child had a craze for that kind of life."

"Well, in time, Louise did like—even love, so she says—the life she was leading, and soon became an expert in the business. Not only that, but from a weakling, she had become a strong, healthy woman."

"This state of affairs did not suit Ralph. The girl had failed to die, or to break her neck, so he resolved to have it done for her, and one night in St. Louis the trapeze rope broke—understand?—and she was brought to the hospital, not quite dead, and Mac—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Bull. "I know the rest. Mac and myself were in St. Louis at the time and there was an appeal in the newspapers for somebody to give up enough blood to save the unfortunate actress."

"Exactly! And he found his sister," said the Fox, adding:

"And, then, began your work against Red Ralph and his gang?"

"Yes. Mac had been hurt a few days before and the doctors refused to accept blood from him, so I gave a little in his stead."

"And what do you think of the engagement between Mac and his own sister?" smilingly asked the Fox.

Bull's face brightened wonderfully.

"Hanged if I can make it out!" he answered.

"I think that letter for you contains glad tidings, and I trust it will not be both glad and sorry," quietly returned Fox.

He was right. A few minutes later the doctor entered and said:

"I am going to violate the confidence of my patient for her benefit. The letter you opened told you who she is. The letter you have not opened tells you—Mr. Bull—that, through shame of her rascally uncle, she spoke of a pretended engagement to prevent you from making what she feared she could not resist, a declaration of love."

"Now, she is dangerously ill, but perfectly sensible. Desperate cases require desperate remedies. You go to her. Say nothing of this, but tell your story."

Half an hour after Bull had eagerly obeyed the doctor's order, the latter knocked at the patient's door—and on entering found a wonderfully recovered woman.

No longer the Tigress, Miss Weston was lying, smiling and blushing, awaiting the usual "how do you feel?" But this time, the doctor himself, answered the question.

"You feel very good! You will be better, and entirely recovered within a month," he quietly declared, and significantly added:

"And if I were you, I would not refuse to name an early day."

The patient blushed scarlet. It was tak-

ing an unfair advantage, but the lover pushed the question.

"There!" he exclaimed. "The doctor, himself, backs me! Say you'll agree to it as soon as you can stand?"

All woman now, Miss Weston would have protested, but the old doctor settled the question for both.

"Miss Weston is too weak to argue. To save her the bother, I'll agree to your proposition. Now, clear out!"

Exactly a month later the doctor's word was fulfilled, and the Fox gave away the bride.

It was a very quiet wedding, for though Mac had been avenged, his loss still made all sad, and the fulfillment of the Dying Detective's Curse simply "wiped out" a dangerous lot of ruffians.

Pike, the only prisoner, confessed to having undertaken the murder of Bull, but had nothing to do with McVeigh—that was Whitey's job—and at Bull's suggestion, he was let off with a comparatively light sentence.

THE END.

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